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Convention and agency in the philosophies of the Mahāyāna

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Abstract

The thesis focuses on the relationship between Sanskrit classical grammar, *Abhidharma*, and the debates between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*. In particular, it shows how the *kāraṇa* system, and the idea of *lakṣaṇa*, influence philosophical argumentation in the context of medieval Indian Buddhist thought. The *kāraṇa* system is the way in which classical Sanskrit grammarians discuss syntax, and in particular, actions and agency. *Lakṣaṇa* means a defining trait, or a definition, at once a scholastic tool and a fundamental way to identify existent entities.

There are five Chapters and two Appendices. Chapter One shows the close links between Sanskrit classical grammar and basic ideas in Buddhist thought, and isolates the *kāraṇa* system as being most relevant in this regard. It also shows certain structural analogies between the *kāraṇa* system and certain important features of Buddhist philosophy. Chapter Two is mostly based on Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and its sub-commentary; it highlights and reconstructs the discussions on *lakṣaṇa* and agency found therein. Chapter Three shows how *Madhyamaka* understands similar issues, and what is the proper context and significance of its refutation of *lakṣaṇas*. Chapter Four shifts the focus upon the *Madhyamaka* understanding of conventional truths, and the role of the *lakṣaṇas* of *Abhidharma*, as well as of the *kāraṇa* system, within *saṃvṛti*. Chapter Five compares the *Yogācāra* views on the very same topics.

Appendix 1 is a translation of Prajñākaramati's commentary to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.1-34, a work where many of the philosophical debates discussed throughout the thesis are well represented. Appendix 2 is a photographic reproduction of a manuscript, containing an anonymous commentary to Nāgārjuna's *Lokāitastava*.

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Introduction

In this thesis, I intend to look at certain aspects of Indian Buddhist thought by showing their interrelatedness and continuity. The aspects I will focus upon are: defining traits, in the technical sense corresponding to the Sanskrit *lakṣaṇa*; syntactical analysis as a presupposition and pivot for philosophical debate; and the issues of conventions, and levels of reference in philosophical language. In particular, I shall argue that classical Sanskrit grammar bears upon central concerns of Buddhism; and that the manner in which these are discussed in the *Abhidharma*, in turn, bears upon their handling in *Madhyamaka*, and its differences from *Yogācāra*. The originality of this approach mainly lies in the consistent attention towards what is not always explicitly thematised by classical authors, and not fully drawn out in the secondary literature: which is, a good many debates within a wide range of Buddhist literature revolve around the proper formation and usage of defining traits (*lakṣaṇas*); and, they are closely intertwined with a specific understanding of actions and agency, in the grammatical sense embodied by the *kāraka* system. It may come as a surprise that even central debates between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* become more comprehensible against this background, and that this does help understanding their respecting positions (even putting into question the plausibility and comprehensiveness of certain available reconstructions). To explain in brief: I try in this thesis to bring to the fore recurring elements (*lakṣaṇa* and *kāraka*) in Buddhist thought, which I think the classical authors considered too obvious to spell out; these elements have also not been consistently analysed by modern secondary literature, perhaps for that very reason. What I have taken as my central concerns appears in much scholarly work solely within the marginal attention of very brief footnotes. The implication of this is, first of all, that much of Buddhist philosophical literature can be seen through an added light; and

more broadly, the thesis will suggest a link between language and sentiency/intentionality, which may be worth even further consideration.

The risk in this type of holistic approach is to start from certain generalised ideas and further speculate away from the actual concerns of the texts. In other words, one may start with a theory ('grammar is important') and confirm it through a self-referential string of arguments that loses sight of the basis it is supposedly engaged with.

To avoid this interpretive pitfall, I have as far as possible referred back to the primary sources and built my arguments around them. I do not claim to have let the texts 'speak for themselves', since my selection and specific reading is an act of interpretation and is open to discussion and debate. Nonetheless, I have tried to respect the level of technicality employed in the Sanskrit sources, as I believed that any simplified re-telling of those arguments would run the risk of distorting their actual emphasis.

The thesis is divided into five Chapters and a lengthy translation, given as an Appendix. The first Chapter treats of classical Sanskrit grammar; the second of *Abhidharma*; the third and the fourth focus on *Madhyamaka* and, partly, its relation to *Yogācāra*. The fifth Chapter more specifically takes up *Yogācāra* philosophy. The text translated in the Appendix is Prajñākaramati's commentary to *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 9.1-34.

In the first Chapter I argue for the importance of Sanskrit classical grammar (*vyākaraṇa*) in relation to central aspects of Buddhist thought. It will be seen that my argument is not so generic and comprises of multiple layers. First of all, grammar is identified as a set of *lakṣaṇas* (defining traits, a term that will be recurrently discussed), common basis for all streams of technical literature in

ancient and medieval Sanskrit. Within *vyākaraṇa*, a specific set of rules about syntax (the *kāraṇa* system) is taken up as a starting point, and some arguments for its centrality are offered. Its importance is shown in two ways: in terms of structural and terminological parallels with basic elements of Buddhist thought, and by pointing out instances of its actual employment in Buddhist literature. In this Chapter, I wish to show that the connection between (a certain section of) classical Sanskrit grammar and Buddhist thought is significant and pervasive: this has far-reaching repercussions even in the later sections of the thesis, where I contrast this reading against, for example, Williams' position.

Chapter 2 shifts to another set of *lakṣaṇas*, those of *Abhidharma*, which are more specifically Buddhist. A section of the Chapter is devoted to how the *Abhidharmakośa* discusses *lakṣaṇas* themselves: which in one sense, is a discussion of the importance and proper significance of *Abhidharma* as a whole (since, *Abhidharma* focuses on the *lakṣaṇas* of *dharma*s). Besides, I reconstruct some debates about agency, which have a direct link to the *kāraṇa* system and are better understood against such background. I will try to show that looking at this Abhidharmic category by respecting the grammatical underpinnings brought out by the commentators, offers a more nuanced and complex reading of certain arguments. In this respect, my interpretation will occasionally differ from other scholars, like Duerlinger and Waldron (although not in all aspects).

Chapter 3 is about some *Madhyamaka* interpretations of the actual status of *lakṣaṇas*, and relies on Candrakīrti as the primary commentarial source. I try to show how his discussions are closely linked to those found in the *Abhidharmakośa*, and how his specific manner of analysing *lakṣaṇas* offer a useful interpretive key to understand the doctrine of emptiness and dependent arising as a whole. It also helps to understand some fundamental differences between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* philosophy.

Chapter 4 is primarily concerned with the issue of how to relate the different sets of *lakṣaṇas* encountered so far: how they are employed by *Mādhyamika* philosophers, why, and how this fits their overall scheme of two truths. The reading I will offer suggests that even Candrakīrti or Prajñākaramati would allow for different degrees of conventional truths, embedded within a specifically Buddhist language, and that this relation between *Madhyamaka* and broader Buddhist concerns is far from accidental. Some of these conclusions differ from previous interpretations: in particular, I will show how Garfield's and Eckel's exegesis contrasts mine.

In the last Chapter the same focal topics analysed in the context of *Madhyamaka* are applied to the *Yogācāra*, highlighting a comparison with the formers' views. The Chapter argues for a rather traditional interpretation of *Yogācāra* as asserting mind-only, but from a new perspective.

The commentary translated in Appendix neatly contains most of the themes dealt with in the body of the Chapters. Prajñākaramati offers in this text ample discussions about the two truths, the issue of graded conventions, and the role of *Abhidharma* therein; and while he discusses *Yogācāra* philosophy, he implicitly delineates his own position about the importance of the *kāraṇa* system. In this way, this Appendix gives an authoritative and well-preserved source representing in a continuous stream of arguments the close connection between different areas of Buddhist thought; which is what I argued for, throughout the thesis.

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Chapter 1

Sanskrit grammar and Buddhism

Just like a grammarian would even teach the syllables,
the Buddha spoke the Dharma according to the capacity of the trainees.¹

Nāgārjuna

Joined with verbal roots and affixes,
a word effects the meaning of the Dharma.²

Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa

Those who do not comprehend the meaning from a correct word,
are seen in this world to acquire knowledge just through incorrect words:
hence, the 'instruction about correct words' has no purpose.³

[...] therefore, there is no such thing as a 'Sanskrit' word.⁴

Dharmakīrti

Indian classical authors employ language analysis as an all-pervasive and determinant method to understand, and debate, philosophical themes. Commentators will often offer a word-by-word gloss, where compounds are split through alternative analyses, and where the implications of certain affixes

¹ *yathaiva vaiyākaraṇo mātṛkāṃ api pāṭhayet | buddho 'vadattathā dharmam vineyānām yathākṣamam* || Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī*, 4.94.

² *dhātupratyaya-yogena śabda dharmārthayojaka* || *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, 23.6bc.

³ *śabdād artham apratipadyamānā apaśabdair eva jñānam vyutpadyamānā loke dṛśyante iti vyartham śabdānuśānam* || *Vādanyāya*, 67.

⁴ *tasmān na saṃskṛto nāma kaścic chabdaḥ* || *Ibidem*. This is a pun. In the discussion that precedes the quote, what is at stake is whether certain words should be considered *refined*, these words being in fact Sanskrit words. 'Refined' is the etymology of the word *saṃskṛta*.

are discussed at length. The exact historical reasons for this sensitivity to language, and hence to its grammar, are not easy to ascertain: nor will they be the main focus of this thesis. What it is also difficult to assess, though, is precisely how Sanskrit classical grammar affects philosophical argumentation; and whether any of its features could be said to be central in that respect. This thesis is more specifically concerned with how grammar may bear upon Buddhist philosophical themes.

As remarked in the introduction, a recurrent focus throughout these Chapters will be on *lakṣaṇas*. When *lakṣaṇas* are understood as verbalised definitions, their formation is ruled (in Sanskrit) by a system of regularised derivations that all literati are implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, asked to refer to. This (Pāṇini's grammar) is itself a set of *lakṣaṇas*: the one of broadest applicability and the basis for all other sets to be comprehensibly enunciated. Starting from classical grammar reproduces the traditional gradation of a philosopher's training, including that of Buddhist philosophers, as even the Chinese travellers to Nalanda have, in ancient times, borne witness to.⁵ It also means beginning from the most basic and common foundation of their shared discourse.

Classical Sanskrit grammar, though, is an extremely broad assemblage of rules; bearing upon anything ranging from euphonic combination to the subtle uses of verbal tenses and moods. To say that it weighs upon philosophical argumentation is nothing new, and is too broad. The only hope to gain a more precise argument is to isolate a particular section of Pāṇini's system and show whichever features are most relevant to the present discussion. The *kāraṇa* definitions, and the commentarial discussions they elicited, provide a particularly valuable framework.

⁵ J. Takakusu (tr.), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion, by I-Tsing*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982 pages 167-185. See also: S. Bael, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003, pages 121-125.

Kāraka rules deal with syntax: they regulate how the other elements in a sentence may be linked to the main action. It is expectable that a discussion of syntax may have deeper philosophical implications than other sets of rules bearing on mere morphology (like for example, the rules of euphonic combination). *Kāraka* definitions are less bound to specific language morphology: they represent linguistic relations that may be found not just in Sanskrit. In effect, these rules have even been employed (with some modification) to describe languages very different from Sanskrit (like Tibetan).⁶ Such feature makes this section of Pāṇini's grammar philosophically more relevant, as it implies a certain understanding of actions and agency that may not be merely determined by Sanskrit sentence structures.

Moreover, *kāraka* definitions do not depend upon the distinction between 'pure' and 'impure words' (*śabda* and *apaśabda*), often de-emphasised in Buddhist texts, and thus cannot be exclusively understood as a tool to preserve a perfect and sacred enunciation (the *Veda*). Lastly, the issue of agency and sentiency or intentionality, that will make a great bulk of the discussion in the later chapters, finds terminological and structural echoes in Pāṇini's *kāraka* system. All this suggests that this section of *vyākaraṇa* may offer a profitable focus.

I will propose a further specification: within the *kāraḥ*, most of my discussion will only bear upon what I called 'primary *kāraḥ*'. This restriction allows to side-step a long debate about how to fit all the *kāraka* rules as philosophically (and semantically) relevant categories. The frequency of the use of these primary *kāraḥ* justifies this restriction for the purpose of the present analysis:

⁶ See for example, Tom J.F. Tillemans and Derek D. Helforth, *Agents and Actions in Classical Tibetan*, Wien: University of Wien, 1989.

yet, I hope that a better rationale for this step will be made comprehensible within the relevant section of this chapter.

1.1 Language analysis: *nirukti* and *vyākaraṇa*

Two distinct, albeit not unrelated approaches, are found throughout the exegetical commentaries of ancient and medieval India. The first depends on phonetic analogy, without resorting to any principled process; it is therefore open to a virtually infinite number of routes. This is a hallmark of the *brāhmaṇa* literature⁷, and is exemplified by Yāska's *Nirukta*. There, the task of the author is to unfold the meaning of each term by relating it to a specific verbal root (*dhātu*). For example, the word *udakam*, meaning water, is explained by Yāska as *unatti iti*, meaning 'it moistens, thus' (it is called water).⁸ This type of analysis, being particularly open ended, allows authors to link preferred doctrinal contents to some important key-words; as such, it is found both in the commentaries and in the primary canonical sources, like the Buddhist *Sūtras*.⁹

The second approach is exemplified by *vyākaraṇa*, or grammar proper. This does not proceed by ad hoc phonetic matches, but purports to regulate the analysis of word-forms by identifying recurrent morphological changes, codified as rules or exceptions. Even the tools of *vyākaraṇa* are elastic enough to allow doctrinally charged exegesis: see for example Yaśomitra's three different etymologies of the word 'Buddha'. Nonetheless, the semantic change from the *dhātu* to the actual word form is to be accounted for through established principles of derivation.

A common trait of both approaches is their value as mnemonic devices. The importance of orality and memorisation in ancient and medieval India must have been enormous, a feature that continues in traditional forms of education.

⁷ See Jan Gonda, *Vedic Literature*, Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1975.

⁸ From the root *√ud*. See *Nirukta*, 2.24: *udakam kasmāt | unattīti sataḥ ||*

⁹ On this, see Ulrich Pagel, *Mapping the Path: Vajrapadaś in Mahāyāna Literature*, Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 2007, especially pages 104-116.

The structure of the texts suggests a long history within a predominantly oral milieu: in reference to Buddhist *Suttas*, this has been convincingly argued for by Lance Cousins¹⁰. Etymological expansion allows to employ the term commented upon as a series of phonetic indexes, that would create a mnemonic link with one's doctrinal interpretation.¹¹

When employed as an authoritative commentarial device, etymology (either in the style of *nirukti* or *vyākaraṇa*) suggests a certain underlying (unseen) semantic pregnancy in the phonemes of the source text. This is understandable, when we look at systems that rely on the Veda and consider its language as perfectly referential of the things in the cosmos. Buddhists too, though, ascribe great importance to *āgama*, and the 'speech of the Buddha' (*buddhavacana*). Although they are at times depicted as rejecting scriptural authority, this only applies to certain schools of Buddhism: as eminent an author as Candrakīrti openly dismissed such restriction¹². The parameters, which allow accepting as *buddhavacana* even what has either possibly, or surely, not been spoken by the Buddha, tell us something of a specific ontological bent. To be *buddhavacana* means (among other things), not to contradict reality, the way things are (*dharmatā*). It also means to counteract negative mental states.¹³ The rationale

¹⁰ Lance S. Cousins, 'Pali Oral Literature', in Paul Williams (ed.), *Buddhism. Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, London: Routledge 2005.

¹¹ Again, see Pagel's comments, Note 2.

¹² See the final section of *Prasannapadā* to *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 1.3, where Candrakīrti includes *āgama* among the four means of valid knowledge (*pratyakṣa*, *anumāna*, *āgama* and *upamāna*). In the *Abhidharmakośa* too, the *Sautrāntikas* are represented as accepting three means of valid knowledge: direct perception (*pratyakṣa*), inference (*anumāna*) and tradition of the apt (*āptāgama*). See *Bhāṣya* to *Abhidharmakośa* 2.55a: *na hy eṣāṃ dravyato 'stīve kiṃcid api pramāṇam asti - pratyakṣam anumānam āptāgamo vā, yathā rūpādīnāṃ dharmāṇām iti* | 'Since for the ultimate existence of these there is not even one means of valid knowledge – direct perception, inference or tradition of the apt – as for the case of *dharmas* like form and the rest'. The idea that all Buddhists do not rely on scripture as a valid means of knowledge is probably an overextension of Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's stance, taken as the Buddhist epistemologists par excellence. Even in their case, the situation is more complex: they would accept verbal authority, but just as a case of well-formed inference. What they would reject, in other words, is not that certain texts might give valid knowledge, but that verbal testimony should be given the status of an independent *pramāṇa*, instead of being taken as a type of inference. This issue is taken up at the very outset in the *Pramāṇaviniścaya* chapter of the *Pramāṇavārttika*.

¹³ See on this Etienne Lamotte, 'The assessment of textual authenticity in Buddhism', in Paul Williams (ed.), *Buddhism. Critical concepts in religious studies*. London: Routledge, 2005.

behind this may have something to do with the purported omniscience of the Buddha. Buddhist texts specify that all what the Buddha speaks is both meaningful and beneficial, and occasionally also that, whatever is well spoken, is the Buddha's word. The approach is probably eminently pragmatic, but ontological suggestions might be derived, by considering the exceptional qualities ascribed to Śākyamuni. The *Mahāsāṅghikas* upheld the doctrine that the Buddha only spoke one letter (the letter A, also preserved as the Perfection of Wisdom in One Letter). In the *Lalitavistara's* narration of Siddhārtha's learning of the Sanskrit alphabet, each syllable is expanded to denote a cardinal Buddhist tenet.¹⁴ Thus, Buddhist authors were inclined to regard the very sounds of *buddhavaṇana* as pregnant with implicit significations. (Consider also some of *Bhavya's* remarks on the sense of Buddhist *dhāraṇīs*).¹⁵

Paradoxically, the apparent unhistorical character of certain etymologies might derive from being temporally determined expressions of a certain state of affairs: *dharmatā*, believed to be the central intent of Śākyamuni's teaching. This claim may seem to contradict a commonly accepted Buddhist doctrine about the conventional character of the relation between word and meaning. The contradiction only arises if we take conventional to imply 'arbitrary'. Such step is hardly necessary, and at any rate not in line with basic principles of Buddhist thought.

Within a widely accepted Buddhist perspective, the very structure of the world as a lived environment (*bhājanaloka*) is dependent upon a collective history of past intentions (shared *karman*). We may tend to understand a convention as an utterly arbitrary stipulation dependent from a set of historical accidents.

¹⁴ More precisely, the *Lalitavistara* tells that when ten thousand youngsters were learning scripts together with the Bodhisattva, due to the latter's influence (*adhiṣṭhāna*), when they uttered each syllable, a meaningful phrase starting with that same syllable was heard. For example, the letter *a* is expanded as *anīyaḥ sarvasaṃskāraḥ*, 'everything compounded is impermanent'; and so forth. See *Lalitavistara*, Chapter Ten: 'The Chapter on the Display in the Script-Classroom', *Lipiśālāsandarśanaparivarta*.

¹⁵ In: Matthew T. Kapstein, *Reason's Traces: Identity and Interpretation in Indian and Tibetan Buddhist Thought*, Boston: Wisdom, 2001.

Accepting the formative role of *karman*, though, gives a different bent to what a Buddhist author may understand as 'history': the arbitrary character of conventions is discarded, without necessarily considering them ultimately founded. It is in other words possible to be a convention, and yet to remain a reliable regularity (as in the case of causal processes). Hence, language too, and phonemes, may be treated as responding to and closely participating in the very fabric of the world and its sentient inhabitants.

This idea can be referred to two aspects, or two different senses in which a world is 'made'. The first is the one just described, according to which a long, diachronic history of past *karman* shapes present experiences, including language. The second is the very basis to speak of such diachronic processes: language itself, and its structures. Here *karman* reappears, and surprisingly or not, its sense is still linked to a structure that resembles the intentionality of the first account. In this chapter, I start from the second sense of *karman*: hence, from *vyākaraṇa*.¹⁶

1.2 Pāṇini

In eight books, comprising about 4000 aphorisms, Pāṇini has given a near complete system to derive the forms of both Vedic and Classical (*laukika*, worldly) Sanskrit. Pāṇini's work is the type of systematic description that I had primarily in mind while employing the term 'grammar'. His *vyākaraṇa* rules are by far the most commonly employed in Sanskrit commentarial literature.

Traditional accounts of Pāṇini's life highlight the superhuman quality of his intellectual endeavour. His grammar begins with fourteen *sūtras*, which would have been revealed by Śiva, beating his kettle-drum. Or, if Pāṇini was a Buddhist, Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, should have inspired him (a certain similarity of roles between Śiva and Avalokiteśvara is not

¹⁶ For a reconstruction of further discussions about the nature of *Buddhavaṇana*, Ensu Cho, 'From Buddha's Speech to Buddha's Essence: Philosophical Discussions of *Buddha-vaṇana* in India and China', in *Asian Philosophy*, Vol.14, N.3, November 2004, pp.255-276.

uncommon, as in the case of Tamil grammar). Whatever one may make of these accounts, Pāṇini commanded a level of respect and admiration, which owned him the epithet of *bhagavān*, employed for kings, gods, and, among others, the Buddha(s). Buddhist sources even state that he would attain awakening, as a *Śrāvaka*.¹⁷

That Pāṇini was not the first grammarian is clear from the references to other authors scattered throughout his own work: he often quotes them as offering alternative regulations (see, for example *lopaḥ śākalyasya*). Yāska might have antedated Pāṇini, but their respective chronology is not clear.

Pāṇini organised his subject matter into *sūtras* or aphorisms, and could well be the initiator of this style of composition. He employed a wide gamut of technical terms and devices, some of which must have been current by his time, while others should have been his own invention. This allowed for the extraordinary conciseness of the *sūtras*, but also made Pāṇini's own Sanskrit a coded language of sorts.

1.3 Buddhist grammarians

I have noted how certain sources make a direct link between Pāṇini himself and Buddhism (namely, that his initial *sūtras* were revealed by Avalokiteśvara, and not Śiva). Aside from this unascertainable biographical link, Pāṇini's system has had far reaching influence in all spheres of Sanskrit literature, and this includes the Buddhist. Many among the great grammarians, who followed Pāṇini's framework, have been traditionally associated with Buddhism.

About one thousand five hundred out of the four thousand *sūtras* of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* (the 'Work in Eight Books', as Pāṇini's main work is called) were

¹⁷ See E. Obermiller (tr.), *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*. Sri Satguru Publications: Delhi, 1986, pages 166-169.

commented upon by Vararuci in his *Vārtikā*. The relation, both historical as well as theoretical, between Pāṇini and Vararuci is debated. Traditional accounts make them contemporaries, sometimes even co-students. Yet, it has been argued that the *Vārtikā* records a different stage in the development towards classical Sanskrit, and must therefore be later. Vararuci is described as a 'Buddhist Brahmin' by Buddhist sources. He is credited with a number of other texts, more explicitly Buddhist in content, ranging from 'good sayings' (the *Śatagāthā*) to Tantric *sādhana*s.¹⁸

Patañjali commented upon Vararuci's own commentary, often defending Pāṇini against the *Vārtikā*'s improvements. Together, Pāṇini, Vararuci and Patañjali constitute the initial period of Pāṇini's school of grammar. Patañjali has been occasionally identified with the author of the *Yogasūtras*. Whether this identification is plausible or not, nobody directly associates Patañjali with Buddhism. His relationship to Buddhist literature, though, is arguably in terms of stylistic influence. Bhattacharya has pointed out that even Nāgārjuna's prose resembles that of Patañjali: plausibly, his commentarial style would have commanded great respect for its clarity and incisiveness.¹⁹ The *Mahābhāṣya* is in the objection-reply format that will be the hallmark of philosophical writing in Sanskrit for many the many centuries that followed it.

The *Cāndra* school, initiated by Candragomin, is quite close to Pāṇini's method. It purports to simplify the terminology of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Significantly, the object of the action is not there denoted by *karman*, but by *āpya* ('something to

¹⁸ See the Introduction to the *Śatagāthā* in: Lobsang Norbu Shastri (ed. and tr.), *Śatagāthā of Ācārya Vararuci*, Sarnath: CIHTS, 2001.

¹⁹ '[...] Nāgārjuna's prose – of which the commentary on the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* is the only extant example – is very similar to that of the *Mahābhāṣya*. Among the 'imitators' of Patañjali's style [...] is therefore to be counted now Nāgārjuna.' Kamaleshwar Bhattacharya (tr.), *The Dialectical Method of Nāgārjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, page 98, note 1.

be obtained'). Candragomin is considered to have been Buddhist, and traditional accounts would make him a lay contemporary, rival and friend, of Candrakīrti.²⁰

A certain number of *sūtras* (35) mark a possible improvement of the *Cāndravyākaraṇa* over Pāṇini. These improvements were incorporated in the next great commentary on the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, the *Kāśikā*, and its sub-commentary, the *Nyāsa*.²¹ The first was authored by Jayāditya and Vāmana, probably each one composing a different section. Jayāditya was possibly Buddhist. I-Tsing mentions that

He revered the Three Honourable Ones (i.e. Triratna), and constantly performed the meritorious actions.²²

The same seems certain of Jinendrabuddhi, who composed the extensive *Nyāsa*. Jinendrabuddhi's commentary provides several valuable insights in the relation between *kāraṇas* and sentiency/intentionality.

The next period of activity for Pāṇini's school consist mainly of recasts, which purport to organise the subject-matter topically, so that word-derivation may be swifter than through the original order of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. The first of such *Prakriyā* grammars is the *Rūpāvatāra* of Dharmakīrti, who is plausibly not the same as the great logician, and could be a Ceylonese *Bhikṣu* of the 12th century.²³ Although later *prakriyā* type grammars surpassed Dharmakīrti's work in popularity, it is remarkable that this new and long lasting trend in Sanskrit grammar would have been initiated by a Buddhist author.

Other Buddhist grammarians could be quoted; but apart from the authors who

²⁰ E. Obermiller (tr.), *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, Sri Satguru Publications: Delhi, 1986, pages 132-134.

²¹ For a different account of the relationship between Cāndra and Kāśikā, see Johannes Bronkhorst, 'The Cāndra Vyākaraṇa: Some questions', in: Madhav Deshpande and Peter E. Hook (eds.), *Indian Linguistic Studies. Festschrift in Honor of George Cardona*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002.

²² J. Takakusu (tr.), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion, by I-Tsing*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982, page 176.

²³ On the author of the *Rūpāvatāra* see the Sanskrit introduction to Rao's edition.

wrote separate treatises on grammar, Buddhist philosophical commentators also show interest and sensitivity to grammatical issues. Yaśomitra, the commentator of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, is keen to give many possible grammatical interpretations of a term, and rarely fails to quote the relevant *sūtra*. The author of the *Vibhāṣāprabhāṣṭī* on the *Abhidharmadīpa* has written sections that could equally fit within a strictly grammatical treatise: in particular, I will show how this is true of his treatment of *kāraṅkas*. Candrakīrti is attentive to *kāraṅka* definitions, and offers some insights of his own on their role and significance.

Either as grammarians, or as philosophers writing in and about Sanskrit, Buddhist authors were active participants in the long debate that depended upon, and occasionally reshaped, the mainstream of Sanskrit *vyākaraṇa*.

1.4 Defining ‘grammar’

The discussion so far, has already given a general idea of what, in the context of Sanskrit *śāstras*, is intended by ‘grammar’. Nevertheless, grammatical literature discusses its own nature in greater detail: in other words, it tries to give a definition (*lakṣaṇa*) of itself, mostly by employing synonyms and expanding upon their sense. Grammar is the basic framework within which all other definitions become possible; and, it does define itself as such.

Cardona has isolated six terms employed in traditional sources: ‘exposition of words’ (*śabdānuśāsana*), ‘analysis/explanation’ (*vyākaraṇa*), ‘technical treatise/branch of knowledge’ (*śāstra*), ‘aphorism’ (*sūtra*), ‘rule’ (*yoga*) and ‘characteristic, definition’ (*lakṣaṇa*).²⁴ I shall follow the order (and partly the content) of his analysis, amplifying upon the areas of greater relevance for the present thesis. Lastly, I will take up a specifically Buddhist synonym for grammar: the ‘science of words’ (*śabdavidyā*).

²⁴ George Cardona, *Pāṇini. His work and its traditions. Volume I. Background and Introduction*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, pages 655-671.

1.4.1 *Śabdānuśāsana*

The words expounded by the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* fall in the two categories of Vedic and 'worldly' usages. *Anuśāsana* has been mostly taken instrumentally, and would therefore indicate a means do distinguish words – proper words (*sādhavaḥ śabdāḥ*) from the improper forms (*apaśabdāḥ*). It is important to highlight how this distinction is not drawn for the sake of comprehension. Commentators (like Patañjali) make it clear that correct and incorrect word-forms are equally capable to convey meanings. Moreover, the relationship between word and meaning (*śabda-artha-sambandha*) is established (*siddha*) from acquaintance with usages in the world (*lokataḥ*).²⁵ What is the purpose, then, of knowing correct word-forms?

The key answer is 'a restriction for the sake of religious duty' (*dharma-niyamaḥ*). Similar restrictions are to be found in reference to ordinary actions, or, in reference to Vedic sacrifices. For an instance of the first type, Patañjali mentions that while, strictly speaking, one could satisfy hunger by eating anything (even a dog), there are prohibitions in reference to, say, village-hens. As far as Vedic sacrifices are concerned, there are specific indications for such details as the type of wood to be employed for a sacrificial pole. These cannot be immediately related to the functionality of the pole as a place to bind the animal to be killed. Similarly, we may convey meaning either with correct or incorrect words, but the latter are to be discarded for the sake of religious merit.

A further issue is the proper locus of relevance of this distinction: does it always matter whether we use proper expressions or ungrammatical expressions? Patañjali replies that it does not, and that the employment of correct forms is enjoined in respect to ritual usage (*prayoga*) only. He adduces the example of some great Sages, who would regularly mispronounce '*yad vā naḥ, tad vā naḥ*' ('come as it may', in a free rendering) as '*yarvāṇaḥ, tarvāṇaḥ*': so much so that '*yarvāṇaḥ tarvāṇaḥ*' became their nickname. Mispronouncing, though, was not a cause of disgrace or demerit, as this was not done during ritual usage of words.

²⁵ See the *Mahābhāṣya*, Chapter 1.

The role of grammar is therefore to draw a distinction between meritorious and non-meritorious verbal usages, and is patently connected with Vedic orthopraxis. The strong link between grammar and the Vedic lore becomes even more apparent when we observe the five primary reasons, for which grammar should be studied (following Patañjali).²⁶

All of the five main purposes relate to the *Veda* and the traditional duties of a Brahmin. One could therefore wonder how grammar could become a common preliminary to the study of other branches of knowledge, and for practically all philosophical systems of medieval India (whether they accepted the authority of the *Veda* or not). In particular, the question of proper and improper word-usage is occasionally declared irrelevant in Buddhist texts: *śabda* or *apaśabda* are a non-issue, as long as the desired meaning can be conveyed (compare the *Lankāvatārasūtra* and the *Kālacakratāntra*). In the quote given at the beginning of this Chapter, Dharmakīrti specifically says that ‘the instruction about correct words’ (*śabdānuśāsanam*) has no purpose. In the same vein, he mentions that they cannot be the means of religious merit (*dharma*), and also that protection of the Veda and so forth (*vedarākṣādikam*) is not at all a purpose for someone who is not following that system (*atatsamayasthāyinaḥ*). Overall,

²⁶ One (strictly speaking, a Brahmin), should study grammar because:

- i. it helps the preservation (*rakṣā*) of the Veda by ensuring that phonetic addition and modification (*āgama* and *vikāra*) is respected;
- ii. Contextual grammatical changes (*ūha*) are employed to fit Vedic mantras to specific ritual usages;
- iii. Grammar is one of the ancillaries of the Vedas (*veda-aṅga*, lit. ‘limb of the Veda’), and it is a Brahmin duty (*dharma*) to study them all. In particular, in the metaphor of limbs, grammar is called *mukham*, meaning face or mouth, but also the ‘main one’;
- iv. Brahmins are, traditionally, teachers; teachers should know proper words. The fastest (*laghu*) method to learn correct usages is through grammar;
- v. Occasionally, ritual injunctions contain ambiguities, and only knowledge of grammar may dispel the doubts (*asandeha*). For example *sthūlapṛṣatī* may either mean that the required cow should have big spots, or that it should be big with spots. A grammarian will be able to decide about the fit interpretation, by knowing that the accentual position indicates the type of compound.

All of this is explained in the first chapter of the *Mahābhāṣya*, which is also the source of the references that precede it.

Dharmakīrti makes a strong argument that, from the perspective of some who is not following the Veda, *Prākṛta* or *Apabhraṃśa* languages could perform the same function as Sanskrit.²⁷ It is obvious though that he is not making a definite statement *against* learning Sanskrit: he himself mostly wrote in that language! And although he does say that *śabdānuśāsana* is purposeless, I doubt this should be taken as implying that *vyākaraṇa* as a whole is so. The choice of terms is here significant: of all the terms from grammar, *śabdānuśāsana* is the one that indicates the teaching of pure, or ‘correct’, words. Dharmakīrti’s argument could in fact imply that *vyākaraṇa* is *not* primarily *śabdānuśāsana*.

Not the whole of grammar is directly or primarily concerned with the regulation of phonetic and morphological purity: the *kāraka* system, as mentioned above, is especially a case in point. Instead of using grammar as a prescriptive and proscriptive device, someone could employ it as an *a posteriori* exegetical tool. This is not so much to evaluate regularity, but rather to ensure precise and nuanced comprehension. The basic framework of the *kāraka* system is employed to understand passages, which do not form words ‘correctly’ in the sense of Pāṇini’s derivational system: such as, Buddhist *Sūtras* in various level of Middle Indic languages.²⁸

With the increased popularity of Sanskrit as a pan-South Asian language of culture, grammar also ensured that it may remain regular enough to be effectively a shared language. Hence, despite the emphasis of commentators such as Patañjali, there are several other reasons for which a Buddhist author

²⁷ See *Vādanyāya* 66-67. In his commentary Śāntarakṣita makes the references to Patañjali explicit. It is important to understand, in any case, that Dharmakīrti and Śāntarakṣita cannot be taken as representative of an ‘official’ Buddhist stance, necessarily shared by all Buddhist authors. Compare for example the initial section of the *Nyāsa*, where Jinendrabuddhi quite faithfully follows Patañjali on the same issues.

²⁸ Perhaps a very good example of this apparent paradox is Chapter 23 of the *Mañjuśrīmūlakalpa*, The Chapter on the Instruction on Words’ Knowledge, Counting and Names (*śabdajñānagaṇanānāmanirdeśapaṭala*). Here a strong case is made for the importance of understanding grammar, yet the whole section is not in perfectly classical Sanskrit. It is therefore clear that morphological purity is not the intended focus when talking of grammar.

may wish to study Sanskrit grammar, apart from ritual purity: I will discuss this further, from a specifically *Mahāyāna* perspective.

1.4.2 *Vyākaraṇa*

The prefixes *vi+ā* attached to the verbal root *kr* (to do, make, create) suggests division, subdivision, parsing: Cardona has shown usages, which retain the sense of separating (cows and calves during rituals), discriminating (true from false), keeping apart, becoming differentiated (on the part of an originally simple entity), or dividing. *Vyākaraṇa* can also mean to explain, to make clear. It may refer to the proper differentiation of speech into speech-parts. *Vyākaroṭi* is also found as meaning ‘he/she utters’.²⁹

Most of the usages conform closely to the sense in which *vyākaraṇa* is *śabdānuśāsana*, as one may gather from the partial overlapping between the meanings of the two terms. *Vyākaraṇa*, though, is etymologically closer to ‘analysis’, and in function and method resembles the science of correct argumentation or reasoning. It is appropriate to stress this point, as grammar is often employed while justifying the plausibility of an argument. Its functional closeness to *tarka* (the science of correct reasoning) is well captured by a traditional saying, that ‘the systems of Kaṇāda and Pāṇini help all branches of knowledge’ (*kāṇādāṃ pāṇinīyaṃ ca sarvaśāstropakāraṇam*). Grammar offered one of the first models of reasoned analysis, like mathematics or geometry may in a different context.

Significantly, the etymological sense of *vyākaraṇa* is close to the idea of

²⁹ This last meaning is the closest to a specifically Buddhist usage, where *vyākaraṇa* means a prophecy. More specifically, *vyākaraṇa* is often found as a Buddha’s prophecy in reference to someone’s future attainment, as in the case of a bodhisattva’s future Buddhahood. The types of *vyākaraṇa* in the sense of prophecy are discussed in *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* 19.35-37. Moreover, *vyākaraṇa* in a Buddhist context can also simply mean an answer or an explanation: see for example the *Suvikrāntavikrāmapariṣcchāsūtra*: *ahaṃ te tasya tasyaiva praśnasya vyākaraṇena cittam ārādhayaṣyāmi* || ‘I will please your mind by answering that very question of yours’.

pravicaya, determination or discreet grouping. The latter is the main objective of *Abhidharma*, which defines wisdom (*prajñā*) as *dharma-pravicaya*.³⁰

I-Tsing tells us that

The name for the general secular literature in India is *Vyākaraṇa*, of which there are about five works, similar to the Five Classics of the Divine Land (China).³¹

On the face of it, this may be confusion about the actual sense of the term; or, it could be a usage of *vyākaraṇa* available at his time, and not well attested. In either case, it is a good witness to the importance of grammar in early Medieval India: the section of I-Tsing's text entitled *The Method of Learning in the West*, is mostly devoted to Sanskrit grammar.³²

1.4.3 Śāstra

Śāstra is a general term referring to any technical branch of knowledge, or to a specific treatise within a branch. Thus we may have: *nāṭyaśāstra* (dramaturgy), *alaṅkāraśāstra* (literary aesthetics), *vāstuśāstra* (architecture), *arthaśāstra* (policy making, or a specific treatise by Kauṭalya), *kāmaśāstra* (erotics), and so forth. In this sense, *śāstra* could be used both in reference to the science of grammar as a whole, or to, in our context, the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*. Cardona notices how even 'individual sūtras of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* are called śāstra'.³³

Definitions of *śāstra* are occasionally to be found in Buddhist literature.

³⁰ See *Abhidharmakośa* 1.3. This definition is also employed by *Mādhyamika* authors. *Prajñākaramati* employs the expression while commenting on the 9th Chapter of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (see Appendix), while *Kamalaśīla* refers to it in the *Bhāvanākrama*.

³¹ J. Takakusu(tr.), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion, by I-Tsing*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982, pages 169-170.

³² *Ibidem*, pages 167-185. See also: S. Bael, *The Life of Hiuen-Tsiang*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 2003, pages 121-125.

³³ See note 6.

According to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, a *śāstra* is so called because it instructs the students.³⁴ Yaśomitra expands and offers a brief discussion of what a *śāstra* truly is, from the perspective of the *Abhidharma*'s ultimate elements of existence:

A collection of names elucidating specific meanings is a *śāstra*. If one says that due to momentariness, a collection is not fit, it is not so: because of constructing a collection in the form of an intellection that apprehends it.³⁵

This type of definition, although resting on specifically Buddhist doctrines, is broad enough to include any *śāstra*, and would fit grammar as well.

Sthiramati's comments on what constitute a *śāstra* are elicited by the very first word in Vasubandhu's commentary to the *Madhyāntavibhāga*.³⁶ Sthiramati offers three types of definitions of *śāstra*: the first one is in the Abhidharmic sense of a collection of ultimate *dharma*s, and it rests upon a specifically *Yogācāra* perspective on *Abhidharma*. The first definition is still akin to Yaśomitra's own, and could apply to any branch of knowledge.³⁷ The second restricts the term *śāstra* to only those treatises capable of eliciting cognition beyond the world (*lokottarajñāna*).³⁸

³⁴ *śiṣyaśāsanācchāstram* | *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* 1.1.

³⁵ *arthaviśeṣābhidyotako nāmasamūhaḥ śāstram* | *kṣaṇikatvāt samūhānupapattir iti cet na tadgrāhakabuddhirūpasamūhakalpanāt* || *Sphuṭārthaṭīkā*, 1.1.

³⁶ *śāstrasyāśya praṇetāram abyarhya sugatātmajam* | *vaktāram cā'smadādibhyo yaṭiṣye'rthavivecane* ||

³⁷ What is the nature of a *śāstra*? If one asks 'What is a *śāstra*?', *vijñaptis* appearing as collections of names and sentences constitute a *śāstra*.
kīdrśaṃ śāstrarūpam | *śāstram kim iti cet nāmapādaśāprabhāsā vijñaptayaḥ śāstram* | On *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.1.

³⁸ Or, *vijñaptis* appearing as specific words capable of bringing a cognition beyond the world, constitute a *śāstra*.
atha vā lokottarajñānaprāpakasābdaviśeṣaprabhāsā vijñaptayaḥ śāstram | *Ibid.*

In respect to these two definitions, Sthiramati offers a brief discussion about the actual possibility of communicating a *śāstra*. The question is: ‘How can *viññaptis* be composed or spoken?’³⁹

Viññaptis are cognitive acts, and according to *Yogācāra* philosophy, the only real existents. Vasubandhu’s initial verse praises the composer (*praṇetaram*) and the speaker (*vaktāram*) of the *śāstra*. It sounds awkward to state that a series of cognitive acts are composed or spoken. The statement suggests that something outside of cognitions does occur, whether a written or spoken text. To this Sthiramati replies that ‘Because imputations bring about the *viññaptis* of a composer or a speaker, there is no fault’.⁴⁰ In other words, it is a convenient and acceptable manner of speech to use terms like ‘to compose’ or ‘to speak’.

He also points out how a *śāstra* may be useful, by linking it to matters of *dharma*, within a Buddhist context and its terminology:

A student inclined towards *dharma*, due to the arising of special discipline, concentration and wisdom, turns away from *karman* that does not make the accumulation of body speech and mind arise, and turns towards the *karman* that makes the accumulation arise.⁴¹

The third definition is necessarily restricted to the *śāstra* being commented upon, and Sthiramati specifies that this means, to the *Mahāyāna*:

That which castigates (*śāsti*) all the enemy afflictions,
which protects (*santrāyate*) from bad births and existence,
is ‘*śāstra*’ due to castigation and the quality of protection.
And these two are not found in other systems.⁴²

³⁹ *katham viññaptayaḥ praṇīyanta ucyante vā* | *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *praṇetṛvaktṛviññaptiprabhavatvāt prajñaptīnām nātra doṣaḥ* | *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *śiṣyadhārmiko hi śīlasamādhiprajñāviśeṣotpādāt kāyavānmanassambhārottpattikarmaṇo nivartate sambhārottpatikarmaṇi ca pravartate* | *Ibid.*

⁴² *yacchāsti vaḥ kleśaripūn aśeṣān santrāyate durgatito bhavācca* | *tacchāsanāt trāṇaguṇācca śāstram etad dvayaṁ cānyamateṣu nāsti* || *Ibid.*

Candrakīrti also explains a *śāstra* through this definition, but implies that only *Madhyamaka* (not *Mahāyāna* in its entirety) fulfils the requirements stated in the verse.⁴³

Among these definitions, the ones that may best help to understand how grammar fits a Buddhist context are, expectably, those written from an Abhidharmic perspective. They tell us how any *śāstra* (and thus, grammar) is placed within the Buddhist cosmos, by stating which types of *dharma*s constitute the whole that we may call a grammatical treatise. In the universe of *Abhidharma*, shared by all Buddhist writers, grammar is a collection of momentary *dharma*s, as both Yaśomitra and Sthiramati clarify.

1.4.4 *Sūtra, yoga*

A traditional verse defines a *sūtra* as having few syllables, not liable to create interpretive doubts, with substance, wide applicability, without insertions, and blemish-less.⁴⁴ Pāṇini's grammar is in form of *sūtras*, maybe the first major work of this type. Its influence upon later philosophical literature is hence stylistic too: many of the foundational texts for the Indian systems are written as collections of *sūtras*. Moreover, commentators often employ exegetical devices taken from grammar (see Yaśomitra's employment of *anuvṛtti* in reference to the *Abhidharmakośakārikā*).

⁴³ Candrakīrti offers a brief discussion, analogous to the one found in Sthiramati's text, but the wording suggests that he takes only *Madhyamaka* as a *śāstra*:

'The master Nāgārjuna composed the *śāstra* out of compassion, to make others understand, as he had understood the way of the perfection of wisdom in an undistorted way.'

[...] *ācāryanāgārjunasya viditāviparītaprajñāpāramitānīteḥ karuṇayā parāvabodhārthaṁ śāstrapraṇayanam* || *Prasannapadā* 1.2.

Compare also Buston's explanation of a *śāstra* in E. Obermiller (tr.), *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet. The Jewelry of Scripture* by Buston, Delhi, Sri Satguru Publications, 1998, pages 41 – 49. Buston also treats of grammar, prosody and lexicography.

⁴⁴ *alpākṣaram asandigdham sāravad viśvatomukham | astobham anavadyaṁ ca sūtram sūtravido viduḥ* || See George Cardona, *Pāṇini. His work and its traditions. Volume I. Background and Introduction*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988, page 670.

The first characteristic feature of an aphorism is brevity. A proverb says that for a grammarian, half a *mātra* (which means, a very small unit of prosody, like a consonant) saved in composing a *sūtra* is cause of greater happiness than the birth of a son. Consider that the word son (*putra*) is explained by Yāska as the one who protects (*rakṣati*) from the hell called ‘*put*’.⁴⁵ The proverb stresses the importance of brevity in grammatical *sūtras*, but also suggests the link between this *vedāṅga* and matters of *dharma*, religious merit and demerit.

Brevity facilitates memorisation, and the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* is meant for that. Pāṇini wrote his grammar in an order, which allowed the reader to supply a *sūtra* with material from other (usually previous) ones, thus completing their sense without the necessity to repeat any word previously stated. Although it is hard to imagine anyone comprehending the intricacies of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* without further instruction, it is true that, in its original format, the work is self-sufficient.

Most of the *sūtras* of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī* are rules, and are called *yoga* in this sense (not in the popular sense of yogic discipline). Patañjali justifies Pāṇini’s system of exposition as the most effective manner to teach correct words. He tells us that one should proceed by stating a rule (*utsarga*), covering the most general (*sāmānya*), while more specific variations (*viśeṣa*) should be dealt with as exceptions (*apavāda*). *Sūtra* can occasionally refer to a group of rules, or even to the whole of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, just as its next partial synonym.

The ordinary Sanskrit meaning of *sūtra* is a thread, and we may be tempted to see in this a reason why the richly ‘woven’ Discourses attributed to the Buddha have been called such. Nevertheless, the Buddhist usage might be a Sanskritisation of a Middle Indic word akin to the Pāli *sutta* and plausibly related to ‘well-said’ (*su+ukta*, used also for the Vedic hymns), rather than a ‘thread’ (*sūtra*). The choice is however significant, and testifies for the popularity of term *sūtra* in the sense of an authoritative, seminal text. It is at times used to refer even to verses, when they are being commented up.

⁴⁵ See *Nirukta*, 2.11: *punnarakam̐ tatas trāyata iti vā* |

Sthiramati notices that certain topics have not been ‘composed as *sūtra*’ (*na sūtritāṇi*) when he wishes to indicate that they are not included in the stanzas of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*.⁴⁶

1.4.5 *Lakṣaṇa*

I have pointed out in the introduction how *lakṣaṇa* is a key term to understand Indian philosophical literature, including the Buddhist. The term *lakṣaṇa* means a characteristic, or the stating of a characteristic, i.e. a definition. Its counterpart *lakṣya*, technically ‘that which is defined or characterised’, also has the primary meaning of a target, like the place towards which to aim an arrow (and is used, in modern spoken Sanskrit, to render the idea of ‘goal’: *tava lakṣyam kim?* What is your goal?).

All of the Indian theoretical systems offer different lists of *lakṣaṇas*. The first and omnipresent system of *lakṣaṇas*, though, is grammar. It is the set of definitions upon which all the others depend, as it regulates linguistic usage in the first place. The last consideration explains the relationship between Pāṇini’s rules and one of their usages in philosophy. Pointing out that an opponent’s argument is not consistent with *vyākaraṇa* implies that the common, shared tool of debate (language) has been misapplied, making what is said, if not unsound, at least incomprehensible. A common grammar allows for the avoidance of one’s stance becoming self-referential. Indian scholasticism abounds in sets of shared formalities of exposition, and of debate, which serve a similar purpose.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Sthiramati’s commentary on Vasubandhu’s *Bhāṣya* to the *Madhyāntavibhāgakārikā*.

⁴⁷ The *anubandhacatuṣṭaya*, four things to be stated at the beginning of any treatises, serve the purpose of placing one’s work in a wider context of philosophical, or perhaps just human, interests. They allow the work to be relevant beyond its technical specificity, and open it to an ongoing debate, which may even refute it. The first question that many philosophical works of ancient India purport to answer is ‘why read this work’.

1.4.6 Grammar as *Śabdavidyā*, in the training of a Bodhisattva

The terms discussed so far are the common heritage of Indian philosophical thought as a whole. One more term, though, appears in Buddhist texts, and describes grammar as a necessary training for a Bodhisattva:

Without having applied oneself to the fivefold knowledge,
the supreme *Ārya* does not in any way reach omniscience.
Thus, to subdue or assist others,
or for the sake of omniscience, he surely applies oneself to those.

There are five types of knowledge: inner knowledge, knowledge of reasons, knowledge of words, knowledge of medicine and knowledge of topics in the arts and crafts. Here he shows the purpose for which a Bodhisattva should research them: all of them, without distinction, are for the purpose of obtaining omniscience. When we distinguish, moreover, he researches the knowledge of reasons and the knowledge of words in order to subdue others, who have no conviction towards that (omniscience). The knowledge of medicine and the knowledge of topics in the arts and crafts are for the sake of assisting others who need them. Inner knowledge is for the sake of directing oneself.⁴⁸

This passage from the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* places grammar within the specific context of the *Mahāyāna* path. The ‘knowledge of words’ is part of a list of five, without which it is impossible to achieve Buddhahood (omniscience).⁴⁹ In this sense, it is an indispensable training within the

⁴⁸ *vidyāsthāne pañcavidhe yogam akṛtvā*
sarvajñatvaṃ naiti kathamcitparamāryaḥ |
ity anyeṣāṃ nigrahaṇānugrahaṇāya
svājñārthaṃ vā tatra karoty eva sa yogam || 60 ||

pañcavidhaṃ vidyāsthānam | adhyātmavidyā hetuvidyā śabdavidyā cikitsāvidyā
śīlpakarmasthānavidyā ca | tadyadārthaṃ bodhisattvena paryeṣitavyaṃ taddarśayati |
sarvajñatvapraptyartham abhedena sarvaṃ | bhedena punar hetuvidyāṃ śabdavidyāṃ ca
paryeṣate nigrahārthaṃ anyeṣāṃ tadanadhimuktānāṃ | cikitsāvidyāṃ śīlpakarmasthānavidyāṃ
cānyeṣāṃ anugrahārthaṃ tadarthikānāṃ | adhyātmavidyāṃ svayam ājñārthaṃ ||
Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra, 11.60:

⁴⁹ I-Tsing also remarks that ‘Grammatical science is called, in Sanskrit, *Śabdavidyā*, one of the five *Vidyās*; *Śabda* meaning ‘voice’, and *Vidyā* ‘science’. J.Takakusu (tr.), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion*, by I-Tsing, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982, page 169. One remarkable

Mahāyāna, as the passage tells us. In the specifics, it is for the sake of bringing towards the *Mahāyāna* those who have no conviction (*adhimukti*) towards it.

The last remark is significant, as it mentions a use of grammar which, however apparently obvious, is absent from the list of Patañjali's main purposes: communicative success. In fact, Patañjali often implies that communication could well occur through improper word-forms (*apaśabda*) and hence the issue of well-formed expressions is relevant only within the context of ritual, sacred activity (see above).

Not everyone may agree that grammar has no role outside of ritual merit. Another passage, from Asaṅga's *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, provides a possible rationale to defend the usefulness of grammar for the sake of communication:

The science of words has also two aspects: the aspect of clarifying the rules to establish roots and forms (or, the forms of roots) and the aspect of clarifying how to esteem the refinement of speech.⁵⁰

The first aspect of *śabdaśāstra* quite obviously refers to *vyākaraṇa*, however we decide to split the compound *dhāturūpa*. The second aspect could well be *alamkāraśāstra*, the science of literary ornaments, or poetic beauty. Besides the wording of the expressions, this is in effect how the Tibetan tradition understands these two facets of the 'science of words'.⁵¹

feature of I-Tsing's account is his emphasis on the importance of Sanskrit grammar, and encouragement to Chinese scholars to study it assiduously.

For another of the five *vidyās*, namely medicine, and its importance in Buddhist learning, see: Kenneth G. Zysk, *Asceticism and Healing in Ancient India. Medicine in the Buddhist Monastery*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1991.

⁵⁰ *śabdaśāstram api dvyākāram | dhāturūpasāadhanavyavasthānaparidīpanākāram vāksaṁskārānuśaṁsaparidīpanākāraṇ ca | Bodhisattvabhūmi* 8, page 68.

⁵¹ See: F.D. Lessing, F.D. and Alex Wayman (trs.), *Introduction to the Buddhist Tantric Systems*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. About *alamkāraśāstra*, see also M.C. Shastri, *Buddhist Contribution to Sanskrit Poetics*, Delhi: Parimal Publications, 1986. It contains valuable information, although it may be difficult to agree with some of the arguments presented.

Further support to the identification of the ‘science of words’ with grammar, is a passage from Sthiramati’s sub-commentary on the *Madhyāntavibhāga*, where the term ‘grammar’ (*vyākaraṇa*) does in effect replace the expected term ‘word’ (*śabda*) in the usual list of five sciences. Incidentally, this passage also offers a rationale for the idea that studying the five sciences is necessary to obtain omniscience: the five sciences comprise all that should be known. Sthiramati is explaining the meaning of ‘something to be known’ (*jñeya*), occurring in the compound ‘obscuration to what is to be known’ (*jñeyāvaraṇa*):

Something that should be known is ‘something to be known’: and that is in its entirety the five loci of knowledge. Moreover, those are called: inner, grammar, reasons, medicine, and topics in all the arts and crafts. Un-afflicted ignorance, being an impediment to knowledge in respect to those, is the ‘obscuration to what is to be known’.⁵²

This explanation on the part of Sthiramati suggests that omniscience is here understood in a qualified sense, as it is spoken of only in reference of something which *should* be known, i.e. whose knowledge would have a purpose: rather than, in reference to any possible object of knowledge.⁵³ Within this perspective, it becomes understandable how and why the five sciences may go towards the exhaustion of purposeful objects of knowledge. Nonetheless, it would be hard to

⁵² *jñātavyaṃ jñeyam | tac ca sarvātmanā pañca vidyāsthānāni tāni punar adhyātmavyākaraṇa hetucikitsāsarvaśilpakarmasthānākhyāni | tatra jñānavibandhabhūtam akliṣṭam ajñānaṃ jñeyāvaraṇam ||* Sthiramati’s sub-commentary on *Madhyāntavibhāga* 3.12.

⁵³ It is also in line with Sthiramati’s usual attention to Abhidharmic terminology, since he qualifies a complete Buddha as someone who has also undone un-afflicted ignorance. This position is identical to the one of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, where un-afflicted ignorance is the difference between an *Arhat* (who has it) and a Buddha (who does not). See the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 1.1.

I doubt that Sthiramati’s definition of *jñeya* is here in any way idiosyncratic, as it is found even in very different texts: Prajñākaramati, commenting upon Bodhicaryāvatāra 9.55 states that ‘what is to be known is fivefold’ (*jñeyam pañcavidham*).

think of grammar as being useful because of its ritualistic (Vedic) applications only.

One parameter that Asaṅga talks about and that Patañjali had not even mentioned is eloquence, refinement of speech. It is not difficult to see what Asaṅga's remarks hint at: eloquence (and by Asaṅga's time, eloquence in Sanskrit) is a mark of high education and possibly, rank: in Sanskrit plays from the Gupta age, only the 'high' characters speak Sanskrit.

Eloquence is particularly important in debate, and there are a few pointers in the first passage translated, which once more show a link between philosophical debate and grammar. First and obviously, they are ascribed to the same specific purpose: subduing others, those with different convictions (as opponents in a debate would be). And if we look at the term employed for 'subduing' (*nigraha*), we find that it is also a technical term in Indian philosophy, referring to an argumentative flaw 'by which a disputant is put down' in debate.⁵⁴

In the context of the *Mahāyāna*, the study of grammar finds its place both as a cause for the proximate result of eloquence, and as one of the necessary causes that, eons later, will give rise to the ultimate result, Buddhahood. For the ritualist Patañjali, the genuine purpose of studying grammar was the dutiful avoidance of demerit within the context of sacred actions. Rather than due to a different perspective on the nature of words and language (as it may be suggested)⁵⁵, the role of grammar in the Vedic or Buddhist systems is bound to

⁵⁴ Apte.

⁵⁵ I have earlier discussed this, while describing Buddhist ideas on what constitutes conventions. Yet, what I feel defeats this reconstruction is that, both for the Vedic and the Buddhist systems, perspectives on language and words are far from monolithic, and hence it is simplistic to just say the 'the' Buddhist and 'the' Vedic accounts are opposed. For example, *Sautrāntika* criticisms to the *Vaibhāṣika* view on language could well apply to non-Buddhist views: and

differ due to an overall difference in the context of application. Besides, while ritual purity suggests the environment of *homa* and *nityakarman*, eloquence fits better with debates and, possibly, the court.⁵⁶

1.5 The *Kāraka* system

Whichever synonym we may use to call it by, grammar as a whole does therefore have a recognisable role in cultured communication of ancient and medieval Indian. This role is even recognised by Buddhist texts, as the immediately preceding section has shown. Nonetheless, as far as theoretical relevance is concerned, it is the *kāraka* definitions that offer the most recurrent set to regulate philosophical debates. The following sections will discuss *kāra*kas in general, and then show how they relate to some important areas of Buddhist thought.

1.5.1 *Vibhakti* and *kāraka*

Nominal declension is classified into *vibhaktis*, or inflexions. European scholars analysed them as ‘cases’ through analogy with Latin, and gave them names, like

possibly, the *Vaibhāṣika*, and not the *Sautrāntika*, would have been the mainstream position for a long time.

⁵⁶ I must thank Daud Ali for bringing to my attention the many links between early medieval Indian courtly culture and Buddhism. Even debates (at least according to traditional accounts) often happened in front of kings, who may even have functioned as judges. In the case of Asaṅga’s text, it is also worth noticing how it was composed during Gupta age, a time which shows the emergence of Sanskrit as a language of culture to an extent difficult to account for.

It is also worth mentioning that even in a Tantric context, grammar finds its prominent place as one of the sciences that make for a qualified teacher. In the *Kriyāsaṃgraha*, it is listed first: ‘He is learned in different branches of knowledge, such as grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), poetry (*kāvya*), hymnology (*chandas*), astrological treatises (*jyotiśāstra*), conversation (*kathā*), recitation (*pāṭha*), different kinds of painting (*lipi*), and different dialectics (*bhāṣā*).’ The list continues, and does indeed suggest a self-cultivation similar to that of the courtier, or urbane man, as described in the *Kāmasūtra* or *Nāgarasarvasva*. See: Tadeusz Skorupski (tr.), *Kriyāsaṃgraha*, Tring: The Institute of Buddhist Studies, 2002, page 19. See also: Wendy Doniger and Sudhir Kakar (trs.) *The Kamasutra*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

'nominative', 'accusative', etc., which indicate the predominant syntactical function. Indian classical grammarians, on the other hand, simply numbered the *vibhaktis* (*prathamā*, first, upto *saptamī*, seventh, and *sambodhana*, vocative, as a sub-type of the first), and thus avoided giving any indication of the syntactical function of each case through their names. The main advantage of such approach lies in the fact that there is no binary correspondence between *vibhaktis* and specific semantic roles, and therefore names like 'nominative', 'accusative', etc., are not exhaustive in representing the manifold functions of each inflexional ending.

Classical Sanskrit syntactical analysis focuses on the action (*kriyā*). What *vibhaktis* express is thus explained through a parallel system of syntactical models, called *kāraka*. They refer to the role a referent plays in the accomplishment of the main action. Since the latter is expressed by the verb, each *kāraka* is a specific relationship that the noun might have with the verb. Thus, the function of most *vibhaktis* can be explained in terms of *kāraka*, except for the sixth, as it generally indicates a relationship (*sambandha*) with another noun, like possession and the like. One may briefly state that *vibhaktis* are the expression, while *kāraḥ* are the expressed.

Even at this level, though, by 'expressed' one is not yet talking about specific referents in the world: we are still concerned with certain types of linguistic relations. On the other hand, these generalised relations are further specified as pertaining to certain referents, not directly by the *vibhaktis*, but by the nominal stems to which they are attached. While *kāraḥ* are not yet sufficient as descriptions of the world, they offer the basic structural framework within which such descriptions may occur. To make this clearer, I will briefly discuss the basic features of a Sanskrit sentence, and how their analysis in terms of *vibhakti* and *kāraka*.

In active constructions, the verbal ending will already tell us the number and person of the agent. Thus *gacchati* will represent a complete sentence meaning

‘he/she/it goes’. The agent (which in this case is also the grammatical subject) can be amplified by the first inflexion singular: *rāmaḥ gacchati*, Rāma goes.

What is re-presented in this active sentence through the first case ending is the *karṭṛkāraka*, an agentive relationship between the noun *rāmaḥ* and the verb *gacchati*. Verb and noun concord in number (singular) and person (third, called first or *prathamā* by Sanskrit grammarians). Strictly speaking, though, the first inflexional ending is not considered to present *karṭṛkāraka* anew, but to amplify upon it: the verbal ending is itself sufficient to indicate an agent with certain specifications (person and number). Thus, Pāṇini's definition clarifies that the surplus information conveyed by the noun in the first inflexion is merely what the verb itself is not capable of expressing: like, a specific thing or living being, gender, etc. It is, in this sense, extra information attached to an agent already indicated by the verbal ending, not the very expression of the agent.⁵⁷

The object of the action is called *karman* and, in active sentences, is expressed through the second *vibhakti*: *rāmaḥ grhaṁ gacchati*, ‘Rāma goes to the house’, *rāmaḥ phalaṁ khādati*. ‘Rāma eats the fruit’.

In Sanskrit, $\sqrt{\text{gam}}$ ('To go') and $\sqrt{\text{khād}}$ ('to eat') are both transitive verbal roots. Thus, we could express the same actions with passive constructions: *rāmeṇa grhaṁ gamyate*, ‘the house is reached by Rāma’, *rāmeṇa phalaṁ khādyate*, ‘the fruit is eaten by Rāma’.

Here the inflexional endings have changed: *rāmeṇa* is the third singular, while *grhaṁ* and *phalaṁ* have become first singular (although the form is identical, as they are neuters). The *kārakas*, though, remain the same: *rāmeṇa* is *karṭṛkāraka*, *grhaṁ* and *phalaṁ* are the amplifiers of *karmakāraka*. In other words, the same

⁵⁷ See Bhaṭṭojī Dīkṣita's commentary on *karmaṇi dvitīyā* for the difference between direct statement and amplification:

‘When the *karman* is not expressed there should be second (*vibhakti*): ‘he worships Hari’. On the other hand, when the *karman* is expressed, it is only the meaning of the specific word, and hence there is the first (*vibhakti*).’

anukte karmaṇi dvitīyā syāt | harim bhajati | abhihite tu karmaṇi prātipadikārthamātra iti prathamaiḥ | Siddhāntakaumudī, 537.

*kāra*ka is expressed by different *vibhaktis* according to whether the construction is active or passive. Here, the direct expression of the object, and not the agent, is through the verb, thus the noun in the first inflexion is again an amplifier of an indication already conveyed by the verbal ending. In other words, the same considerations about the agent in an active sentence and its relationship to the first case, apply to the object of a passive sentence.

Apart from *vibhaktis*, there are more ways in which Sanskrit can express the various *kāra*kas. Primary suffixes (*kr̥t*), secondary suffixes (*taddhita*) and compounds (*samāsa*) are capable of representing certain agentive relations, even in nominal constructions, where the verb is absent or at least implicit.⁵⁸ *Vibhaktis* offer a very clear example of the relationship between expression and expressed, and referents in the world: the same model can be easily applied for the other possible expressions of *kāra*ka relationships.

1.5.2 What a *kāra*ka is

Cardona's views on the role of *kāra*kas as 'an intermediary between semantics and grammatical expressions derived by rules of grammar'⁵⁹, seem to me the most convincing characterisation of the Pāṇinian category. This is compatible with the idea presented above, that *kāra*kas, while being an underlying expressed structure of agency, are not yet sufficiently specified to describe the world.

A profitable analogy could be drawn between *kāra*kas and geometrical formulae. The latter cannot yet relate to the 'outside' world, unless their variables are further specified. Once this is done, though, geometrical formulae can tell us something more about the outside world, as the other unknown variables depends for their value upon those we already know.

⁵⁸ For a brief and clear survey of Pāṇini's grammar's main features: Saroja Bhate, *Panini*, Delhi, Sahitya Akademi, 2002.

⁵⁹ George Cardona, *Pāṇini. A Survey of Research*, The Hague: Mouton & B.V. Publisher, 1976.

This happens within a certain system of postulates, and even if it may be arbitrary to some degree, it works with regularity. Certain descriptions become incoherent with a system: a square circle is a self-contradiction, within a specific framework. That *kāra*kas may work similarly, means that certain expressions may be said to imply a ‘square circle’ of sorts. As we shall see, this consideration is central to assessing some important debates between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*. If the force of certain *Mādhyamika* objections has not been satisfactorily understood or represented, I believe this is due to a disregard for the role of *kāra*ka. When we understand them as formative and basic structures, with regularities that need to be respected, the arguments can be better assessed: this will be one of the tasks of Chapters 3 and 4.

Cardona’s stresses the non-ontological value of Pāṇini’s analysis of *kāra*kas: for example, knowledge, or axes, or square circles, can be grammatically well-formed agents. This bears upon the *kāra*kas ample usability as regulatory conventions: not being committed to a definite ontology, they could be appealed to by all. Nevertheless, I would like to introduce some further considerations.

I have started by noting how the *kāra*ka classifications do not strictly depend from the distinction between correct and corrupt or dialectal forms, implying that they could equally serve to regulate the syntax of a morphologically ‘loose’ Sanskrit. This would have been especially desirable for a Buddhist author: in the very sections, which discuss the nature of *kāra*kas, Candrakīrti quotes Buddhist *Sūtras* which, in Middle-Indic ‘mixed Sanskrit’, corroborate his refutation of agency⁶⁰. The force of the argument does not depend on the morphological regularity of the statements, and the latter can be applied to refute agency as a semantic ultimate. *Kāra*kas have also been employed to construe explanatory

⁶⁰ See *Prasannapadā* to *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 8.13, quoting the *Āryopāliparipṛcchā*: *na ca kāraku kārāṇaṃ santi yehi kṛtā asitomaraśaṣṭrāḥ* | and also: *teṣv api kāraku nāstiha kaści te’pi ca sthāpita kalpavaśena* | I cannot think of a better instance, where the very word *kāra*ka is not given in the regular Sanskrit form (not through *śabda* but as an *apaśabda*, or perhaps one should say *rṣiprayoga*). The same verses are quoted in the commentary to 1.3 (counting the introductory verses as 1 and 2), which is linked to a similar discussion.

models for languages other than Sanskrit. This is comprehensible in the case of Pāli, closely related and structurally akin to the language analysed by Pāṇini. Even Tibetan, though, has been analysed through the same categories, which suggests the wide applicability of the *kāraka* system. It also suggests that *kāra*kas are broad structural categories without too close a link to any specific syntactical or morphological system (with any specific language, like Sanskrit). This seems at odds with Cardona's own analysis and, since I have earlier accepted his views, some clarification may be necessary.

When we look at the discussions about what a *kāraka* is, we find that commentators explain it as either a causal factor (*nimitta*, *hetu*) or a power (*śakti*, *sāmarthya*), rather than a thing.⁶¹ Some of Pāṇini's rules would not make sense if we were to take the *kāra*kas to refer to things, and since the grammarians' focus is on words (*śabda*) rather than their intended referents in the world (*artha*), a relational view of syntactic categories seems more appropriate: the notion of capacity fulfilled such explanatory role. Nonetheless, other rules could not be explained by understanding the *kāraka* as a capacity. In particular, we will see that the rule referring to continued agency (*samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle*) required that 'agent' should be understood as the possessor of the capacity, rather than the capacity itself. Or, as the commentators put it, the difference between capacity (*śakti*) and its possessor (*śaktimat*) should be

⁶¹ See the *Mahābhāṣya*, *Kāśikā*, *Nyāsa* and *Padamāñjarī*. For the explanation of *kāraka* as a causal factor, see the commentaries on *kāra*ke, as also the *Prasannapadā* on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 8.1, which follows Patañjali: 'In this context, what does is called *kāraka*, the agent' (*tatra karotīti kāraḥ kartā*). The *Kāśikā*, *Nyāsa* and *Padamāñjarī*, though, argue that *kāraka* should not be treated strictly as an agent, but rather as a causal factor (*nimitta* or *hetu*).

For the explanation of *kāraka* as *śakti*, see the commentaries on *samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle*, and also the *Prasannapadā* on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 2.6, where Candrakīrti explicitly states that 'a *kāraka* is a capacity, and not a substance' (*śaktir hi kāraḥ na dravyam*). Candrakīrti's position has been analysed and compared to the grammarians in: Kamaleshvar Bhattacharya, 'Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion: their grammatical basis', in: Kamaleshvar Bhattacharya, et al., *A corpus of Indian studies. Essays in honour of Professor Gaurinath Sastri*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1980.

overlooked. What this implies is that, in the second instance, we have a definition of *kāraḥa* with a stronger semantic bearing.⁶²

Both in the sense of capacities or possessors of capacities, *kāraḥas* are linked to the main action. Here again we have a semantic duplicity of the word *kriyā*: it can mean an action, but it can also mean an action-word (*kriyāpadam*), that is, a verb in a sentence. As noticed by Matilal, in the latter case the *kāraḥa* is defined as ‘syntactically connected to the verb’ (*kriyānvita*) and the definition is thus removed from the world of things and actions. When the first sense of the word *kriyā* is employed, though, *kāraḥa* is defined as ‘that which brings about an action’ (*kriyānirvartaka*), ‘cause of an action’ (*kriyānimitta*) or ‘that which gives birth to an action’ (*kriyājanaka*). This is semantically more charged.⁶³

We can therefore detect a double oscillation in the semantic relevance of *kāraḥas* even when we look at the most general characterisations of the category: capacity or capacity-possessor (*śakti* or *śaktimat*), connected to a verb or, cause of an action (*kriyānvita* or *kriyānimitta*). This might be the fundamental reason why Matilal seems to sympathise with Bhavānanda’s manner of defining a *kāraḥa*, which is: eminently non-committal and possibly a compromise. But not only *kāraḥas*, as a whole, appear to have a semantic weight difficult to assess: different *kāraḥa* categories have considerable different weight – which gives us a possible interpretive key to their varied employment.

1.5.3 Primary *kāraḥas*

Cardona himself notices that there is a difference in the semantic weight of what we could call the ‘primary definitions’ of *kāraḥas* as opposed to the secondary rules (or, we may say, exceptions: like the *karmapravacanīyas*). Those accounts that stress the semantic value of *kāraḥa* categories fail to make sense of anything but the primary definitions, and remain unsatisfactory.

⁶² See George Cardona, ‘Pāṇini’s “kāraḥas”’, in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 2, 231-306. See also the Appendix to this chapter.

⁶³ See Bimal Krishna Matilal, ‘Bhavānanda on “What is a Kāraḥa?”’, In Madhav Deshpande, and Saroja Bhate (eds.), *Pāṇinian Studies. Professor S.D. Joshi Felicitation Volume*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991.

Matilal has drawn a similar distinction between 'initial' or 'primary' meanings of the *kāraḥas* and their 'extended or secondary senses'.⁶⁴ The context for the discussion is significant, since the author quotes from Vātsyāyana's commentary to *Nyāyasūtra* 2.1.26, where a relatively detailed explanation of the six definitions of *kāraḥas* is given. According to Matilal, the commentator is here attempting a rebuttal of Nāgārjuna's arguments against the ultimate validity of *pramāṇas*, valid sources of knowledge.⁶⁵

Vātsyāyana's analysis is eminently semantic and, as noted by Matilal, fails to account for cases where the same semantic instance is assigned a different *kāraḥa*. For example, although the substratum or locus of an action is normally called *adhikaraṇa*, the same becomes *karman* if the prefix *adhi* precedes certain verbs. We have *grāme tiṣṭhati*, 'He stays in the village', with 'village' (*grāme*) taking the 7th inflexional ending, since it is the locus, defined as *adhikaraṇa* (*ādihāre'dhikaraṇam*, 1.4.45). But, in *grāmam adhiṭiṣṭhati* again meaning 'He stays in the village', the same substratum is classified as *karman* (normally, the object of the action) and thus takes the second *vibhakti*.

Five points here should be noted:

- i. there is a difference in the semantic weight of primary and secondary definitions of *kāraḥas* (perhaps, rules and exceptions);
- ii. there is a difference in the linguistic specificity of primary and secondary definitions of *kāraḥas* (the latter being applicable only to Sanskrit);
- iii. the *kāraḥa* categories employed to describe languages other than Sanskrit are usually only the defining rules (which corroborates the previous point with a factual instance);

⁶⁴ See Bimal Krishna Matilal, *The Word and the World*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, page 43.

⁶⁵ See especially the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*.

iv. shorter grammars (see the *Sārasvata*), even in Pāṇini's own tradition (like the *Lagusiddhāntakaumudī*) give only the primary definitions;

v. philosophical writers across the spectrum – like Vātsyāyana and Candrakīrti – treat only of the primary definitions, and treat of them as semantically (and one would say, philosophically) significant.

All this suggests that there was a perceived difference in the *importance* of the primary and secondary *kāraṇa* definitions. Cardona and Matilal may be justified in stressing that to account for Pāṇini's *entire* system of *kāraṇa*, their semantic strength should not be overestimated. It seems, though, that a long tradition in India took the initial definitions as more representative and explained *kāraṇas*, accordingly, as categories with a stronger theoretical bearing. This tradition starts, arguably, with Patañjali, whose discussion of *kāraṇa* has a greater cogency if we restrict it to the six major rules only.

Thus, to further delimit my initial claim, the section of Pāṇini's grammar that could most interest Buddhist philosophers is not the *kāraṇas* as a whole, but the six primary *kāraṇa* rules. These are relatively independent of specific morphologic expressions, and can be discussed as significant theoretical structures. This explains both why Candrakīrti employed them so profusely, and why Sthiramati found hardly a place for them in his *Yogācāra* commentaries (where it is more difficult to place an 'independent agent').

These are the six main definitions of *kāraṇas*:

svatantraḥ kartā (1.4.54)

'The independent one is the agent'

kartur īpsitatamaṁ karma (1.4.49)

'That, which is most desired by the agent, is the object of the action (*karman*)'

sādhakatamaṁ karaṇam (1.4.42)

'The most instrumental is the instrument (*karaṇa*)'

karmaṇā yam abhipraiti sa sampradānam (1.4.32)

‘That which (the agent) intends through the object of the action is the recipient (*sampradāna*)’

dhruvam apāye’pādānam (1.4.24)

‘What remains fixed when something is detached is the point of removal (*apādāna*)’

ādhāre’dhikaraṇam (1.4.45)

‘The substratum is the receptacle (*adhikaraṇa*)’

I have given the rules in the order corresponding to the successive inflexions, through which the different *kāraṅkas* would generally be expressed in active constructions. As the numbers between brackets indicate, this is not the same order followed in the original enumeration of the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, but it is the one found in most recasts (except that *karman* and *karṭṛ* are inverted). The translation is, at the most, indicative, since, as we have seen, the *kāraṅkas* might not be sufficiently specified to allow for a meaningful and uniform rendering into English correspondents. They are, primarily, grammatical terms with a technical sense (as given through their definitions).

Among the six, not all appeared equally interesting to philosophers. Expectedly, most of the latter’s attention is devoted to the first two *kāraṅkas*, as the agent and the object of the action are both crucial and problematic categories. From now onwards, I shall focus my attention to these two, showing how they operate within the framework of certain foundational Buddhist ideas.

1.5.4 The autonomous agent

The lack of an agent and the lack of someone who causes to act on the part of form, feeling, notion, compositional factors and consciousness, is itself the Perfection of Wisdom.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ The entire quote: ‘Suvikrāntavikrāmin, form has no agent, nor someone who causes to act; and so it is for feeling, notion and compositional factors. Consciousness has no agent, nor someone who causes to act. The lack of an agent and the lack of someone who causes to act on the part of form, feeling, notion, compositional factors and consciousness, is itself the Perfection of Wisdom.’

The *kartṛkāra* is the *kāra* expressing agency more than any of the others. All the *kāras* are participants in the action, and the very term *kāra* has been defined as ‘one who does’ (*karoti iti*).⁶⁷ In this sense, all of them are agentive relationships to an extent: but the commentaries explain that *kāra* has the more generic sense of a causal factor (*nimitta*).⁶⁸ The *kartṛkāra* corresponds more closely to what in English one may consider an agent. It may therefore appear as the most problematic, in a world where persons are mere imputations: and such world is shared by most Buddhist authors.

Yet, *kartṛ* is a technical term for a *kāra*, and as we have seen, its bearing on actual referents in the world must therefore pass through a certain degree of indirection. It is a flexible category, and the question of its compatibility with Buddhist ideas must take this fact into account.

The first sense in which the category is flexible is then that it is purely a grammatical relation. One may say that ‘a square circle won the marathon’ and the square circle would count as *kartṛ* in grammatically well-formed sentence. If one may further attempt to discuss whether and in which contexts such statement may be sensible, this is precisely because the sentence is grammatically well-formed, hence, comprehensible. In other words, the fact that

*na hi suvikrāntavikrāmin rūpasya kaścikartā vā kārayitā vā | evaṃ vedanāsaṃjñāsaṃskārāṇāṃ
| na vijñānasya kaścikartā vā kārayitā vā | yā ca rūpavedanāsaṃjñāsaṃskāravijñānānām
akartṛtā akārayitṛtā iyaṃ prajñāpāramitā || Suvikrāntavikrāmaparipṛcchā, Tathatāparivarta.*

⁶⁷ See the *Mahābhāṣya* on *kāra*.

⁶⁸ This is the position of the *Kāśikā*:

The word *kāra*, moreover, is a synonym for a causal factor: ‘*kāra*’ and ‘cause’ do not refer to something different. Whose cause? The cause of the action.

kāraśabdaś ca nimittaparyāyaḥ | kāraṃ hetur ity anārthāntaram | kasya hetuḥ | kriyāyāḥ ||
Kāśikā on *kāra*.

This position is defended by Jinendrabuddhi, who shows the many unwanted consequences in taking the word *kāra* to mean the same as the agent (*kartṛ*).

‘square circle’ successfully expresses the agent makes it possible to wonder whether it may *really* be an agent.

The category *kartṛ* is also to be understood as rather flexible in the specificities of its definition. We have seen that Pāṇini defines the agent as autonomous: *svatantra*. A well argued reconstruction of early Medieval Indian court life has focused on the tension between relative dependence (the state of *paratantra*) and the constant desire to increase independence (becoming *svatantra*) and thus social position.⁶⁹ The significant feature of this account is that each of the elements at play is dependent and independent only in relation to certain respects. Such contextual character of independence helps to understand its syntactical sense, as well as Buddhist analyses of agency, which decide to rely upon, or do away with, classical Sanskrit syntax.

Both Patañjali and Jinendrabuddhi explicate the sense of dependent as ‘the main one’ (*pradhāna*), to avoid an etymological confusion with ‘that which has strings (*tantra*)’, a loom.⁷⁰ Dr.Satyanarayana of the Oriental Research Library, Mysore, adduced a simple example to clarify the equation of independence with

⁶⁹ Daud S. Ali, *Courtly culture and political life in early medieval India*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

⁷⁰ Jinendrabuddhi:

This word *svatantra* exists as a *bahuvrīhi*: the one who has its own (*svam*) loom (*tantra*) is called *svatantra*. It also occurs as a word resting on convention, looking like a compound, functioning in the sense of ‘what is main’, as in: ‘this Devadatta is here *svatantra*’, where it is understood as ‘the main one’. Among these two, if one takes up the first meaning, then it would only be for a weaving loom: because, *tantra* means stretched threads, and that is only found in a weaving loom. It could not refer to instances like ‘Devadatta cooks’. On the other hand, if one takes up the other meaning, it applies to all instances. Therefore, due to the propriety of such pervasion, that only is taken up. Having considered all this, he says ‘*svatantra* means the main one’.

asty ayam svatantraśabdo bahuvrīhiḥ | svam tantram yasya sa svatantraḥ | asti ca samāsapratirūpako rūḍhiśabadaḥ pradhānārthavṛttiḥ yathā svatanthro 'yam iha devadatta iti pradhānabhūta iti gamyate | tatra yadi pūrvo grhyeta tadā tantuvāyasyaiva syāt vistrīṭā hi tantavas tantram tac ca tantuvāyasyavāsti | devadattaḥ pacatītyādaḥ na syāt | itarasya tu grahaṇe sarvatra bhavati | tasmād vyāpter nyāyāt sa eva grhyata iti matvāha svatantra iti pradhānabhūta iti || Nyāsa on Svatantraḥ kartā.

predominance. In a household, the 'lord of the house' (*gr̥hapati*, which means, the husband) can give orders to everyone, but nobody else can order him about. Thus, he is independent (*svatantra*), because he is the main person (*pradhāna*), while anyone who is not the main person cannot be called *svatantra*. When amplified, the example can also account for the contextual sense of 'independent', since the same housemaster loses his independence in respect to, say, the king.

This relative character of dependence is further highlighted in the analysis of causative constructions, where one agent is prompted by someone else to perform an action.⁷¹ In these, the *svatantra* is also the one who performs the action, despite his dependence from a prompting superior. This is because he is still expressed as the main causal factor, and hence he will be *svatantra* in the technical sense of *pradhāna*. Such discussion clearly debars the possibility of taking *svatantra* as absolute, actual autonomy.

Jinendrabuddhi offers another rationale, by which we must understand that *svatantra* means 'main', rather than factually independent. The content of the hypothetical objection has a remarkably Buddhist flavour (Jinendrabuddhi is a Buddhist author):

The accomplishment of an action is surely dependent upon an assemblage, wherein even if one part is absent (the action) is not accomplished. Then, who has here the quality of being 'main', for the sake of whose inclusion *svatantra* is mentioned?⁷²

[...]

Even though all take part in the accomplishment of the action, still, only that, whose quality of being main is wished to be expressed, is called 'main' (*svatantra*); not another. 'Devadatta cooks' - here

⁷¹ See the *Mahābhāṣya*, and also the *Nyāsa* and the *Padamañjarī*, on *tatprayojako hetuśca*.

⁷² *nanu ca sāmagryadhīnā hi kriyāsiddhiḥ, ekasyāpy abhāve na sidhyati, tat kasyātra prādhānyam yatparigrahāya svatantragrahaṇam kriyate* || *Nyāsa* on *svatantraḥ kartā*.

Devadatta is expressed by the agentive suffix in the verbal ending, because of its designation as an agent.⁷³

The reply implies that one could possibly speak of any among the other causal elements in terms of *kartṛkāra*. It opens the way for philosophical debates, where the question of identifying an ‘agent’ is at stake; even when we are not concerned with persons, but with ultimate, momentary *dharmas*. The implications of these remarks find echoes in the Abhidharmic discussions reconstructed in Chapter 2. The author of the *Vibhāṣāprabhāvr̥tti* expands upon the ideas of Jinendrabuddhi, proposing parameters of his own to decide what causal factor is to be considered main (and thus, as the agent: the passage is translated in Chapter 2).

One more short, and intriguing, text presents a brief discussion about the possible autonomy of the agent. This is the *Madhyamakaśālistambasūtra*, whose latter part looks much more like a śāstric discussion by an author who is, unfortunately, unknown. The *Sūtra* is in many parts rather difficult to interpret, but the few comments about autonomy (*svātantrya*) are quite comprehensible and show an obvious grammatical background:

Moreover, autonomy is a debatable issue: thus, dependence is logically pervaded by being incidental. What is incidental is dependent: like the seed towards the giving birth to a sprout, when the seed is covered by the roof of a granary.⁷⁴

The example that this (and other *sūtras*) give to exemplify causation is that of a sprout coming from a seed. If one says that the seed produces the sprout, the seed becomes the *agent* of the action of production. If the *svātantrya* of the

⁷³ *yady api kriyāsiddhau sarveṣāṃ vyāpāraḥ tathāpi svāntatryaṃ yasya vivakṣyate sa eva svatantra ity ucyate nānya iti | devadattaḥ pacatīty atra devadattaḥ kartṛsamjñakatvāt kartṛpratyayenocyate lakāreṇa || Ibidem.*

⁷⁴ *svātantryaṃ ca vivādapadam | tasmāt kādācitkatayā paratantratā vyāptā | yatkādācitkaṃ tat paratantram yathā kuśūlatalanimīlitaṃ bījaṃ a ṇ kurajananaṃ prati | Madhyamakaśālistambasūtram*

agent were to be taken too literally, it would not work in the case of a seed, since the production of the sprout depends on certain conditions (thus, the seed is not completely autonomous).

1.5.5 What the agent most wishes for: *karman*

The term *karman* is central to Buddhist philosophy, as the most basic tension which projects an entire cosmos up to its very fine details. Both Vasubandhu and Candrakīrti concur about the formative role of *karman*, while disagreeing on much else.⁷⁵

Buddhists understand *karman* in terms of intention, the most significant parameter to define the projective quality of actions. Such appeal to intention is absent in the philosophy of many Vedic thinkers: Patañjali makes it clear that unintentional transgressions are as bad as conscious ones.⁷⁶ Vasubandhu, on the other hand, quotes a scriptural passage that defines it as: *cetanā karma, cetayitvā karma*, as an intention and what comes after an intention.⁷⁷

Prima face, the philosophical senses of *karman* may be easily distinguished from its grammatical homonym, referring to the object of the action. Yet, the use of *karman* in its grammatical sense is not infrequent in Buddhist *sāstras*, and there are cases where both readings could be possible (as in Nāgārjuna's verses on agency).⁷⁸ In other cases, it is to be understood contextually, and in

⁷⁵ *karmajaṃ lokavaicitryaṃ cetanā tatṛptaṃ ca tat | cetanā mānasaṃ karma tajje vākkāyakaṃ* || *Abhidharmakośa* 4.1. Compare with the following from Candrakīrti: *sattvalokaṃ atha bhājanalokaṃ cittaṃ eva racayaty aticitram | karmajaṃ hi jagad uttam aśeṣaṃ karma cittaṃ avadhūya na cāsti* || *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.89, quoted in the Sanskrit by Prajñākaramati, while commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.73, right after he quotes Vasubandhu.

⁷⁶ See *Mahābhāṣya*, 1st Chapter.

⁷⁷ See *Abhidharmakośa* 4.1 and *Bhāṣya* on the same.

⁷⁸ I am here referring to *Lokāṭīastava* 8, which will be discussed in Chapter 3, and also to *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 8.1. Commenting on the word *karman* occurring in the verse, Candrakīrti uses both a more general, and also a specifically grammatical sense:

other instances the grammatical interpretation is the only sensible one. It is quite important to be careful not to interpret all occurrences of *karman* in Buddhist texts as perfect synonyms. Differing translations, though, tend to obscure what my considerations so far would suggest: Buddhist authors perceived a relationship between the two senses.

What is most counterintuitive, though, is that the two senses may be treated as actually one. Apparently, the Abhidharmic sense refers to intention or acting after an intention, while the grammatical sense does not. Candrakīrti offers an important example of treating the two as synonyms (as noticed by May).⁷⁹ It is therefore important to look back at the grammatical explanations of this *kāraka*, and then once more try to understand the link between the two senses of *karman*.

Pāṇini defines *karman* as 'that which the agent desires the most'. If we look at the commentaries, though, this is a deficient translation: the word which we translated with 'desires' conveys the additional meaning of 'pervading, reaching'. Therefore, that which the agent most desires to reach, or to pervade through the action, is *karman*.

Not all cases of grammatical agency, though, seem to allow for an desire, or for an actual reaching out. Jinendrabuddhi clarifies that in such instances we have

'It is done, therefore it is *karman*, what is most wished for by the agent'.
kriyāta iti karma kartur īpsitatamam || *Prasannapadā* on 8.1.

This is quite significant, considering that the rest of the commentary to the same verse makes it clear that he also takes *karman* in the specifically Buddhist sense of 'morally' charged action of body, speech or mind. In other words, Candrakīrti shifts with ease from the Abhidharmic to the grammatical sense of the word, as if it were self-evident that they are indeed the same. See on this Kamaleshvar Bhattacharya, 'The grammatical Basis of Nāgārjuna's arguments. Some further considerations', in *Indologica Taurinensia*, 8-9, 1980-81, pages 35 – 43. The article contains a translation of the relevant sections of the *Prasannapadā*.

⁷⁹ See Jacques May (tr.), *Candrakīrti: Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti (Commentaire limpide au Traité du Milieu)*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1959, note 413 page 144. The most perceptive of May's remarks are perhaps those regarding the fact that 'En fait, les divers sens du terme *karman* ne se séparent pas dans l'esprit de nos auteurs[...]' and despite its brevity in comparison to Gerow's discussion, the argument he makes for their identification is similar and highlights certain crucial points. Especially, May marked that the 'object-directs' are nothing but 'spécifications (*viśeṣaṇa*) de son acte', which is not very different from Gerow's reproduction of the late grammarians' argument for the ultimate identity between *phala* and *vyāpāra*.

to rely either solely on the pervasion, or solely on the desire. The parsimonious gradual approach of Sanskrit grammarians allows to include cases where the agent appears to have no sentiency, since the specification of the agent as insentient through the first *vibhakti* (in active constructions) is a second degree amplification upon the most general conveyance of an agent on the part of the verb. Two terms are sufficient to make up a sentence with an object, i.e., verb and object - since the verb itself designates an agent. In which case, analysis in terms of intention may well absolve itself from considering additional information about the non-sentiency of the agent. In this sense, *karman* is a structural relationship between the term in the second *vibhakti* and the agency represented by the verbal ending: it does not concern itself with the specified referent 'in the world', what the first *vibhakti* conveys.

It is also significant that intention is taken as the defining trait of *karman*. Intention here has to be understood in a more technical sense of one element of sense *tending towards* the other, not as anything to do with real sentiency. Grammatical 'intention' is therefore structurally akin to Abhidharmic intention (*cetanā*), but is a relation occurring within the context of sentential meaning, not yet a force between referents 'in the world'.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ See the following section of Jinendrabuddhi's discussion:

Opponent | Nonetheless, in instances like 'the river draws the bank' how can there be designation as *karman*?

Reply | And why should it not be there?

Opponent | Because, the river has no intention/sentiency (*cetanā*); because non-sentient things cannot have 'desire to reach out' (*īpsā*).

Reply | That is not so. Here, absence of 'desire to reach out' (*īpsā*) and the presence of a non-sentient thing are understood due to a relation to the additional word 'river'. Yet, while explaining a word a sense, which is to be understood through relation to another word, is not to be employed.

Therefore, the pervasion (reaching out, *vyāpti*) is in reference merely to desire in sections like 'draws the bank'. And *karman* is here being explained. Even though afterwards, due to the relation with 'river', lack of sentiency and absence of desire may be understood, still, since this is an extrinsic part, it cannot ward off the work of designating the relevant part. By the same logic, wherever there is no pervasion (*vyāpti*) and there is only mere desire, even in such instances there is designation as *karman*, as in 'I want to go to the village, yet I have no power to go'.

This structural analogy is the first link between the two usages of *karman*, and regards more specifically the first of Vasubandhu's definitions: *karman* as *cetanā*. Another set of considerations brings the grammatical *karman* closer to *cetayitvā* (acting after an intention) as well.⁸¹

Gerow has offered a rather elaborate discussion about the proper sense of *karman*.⁸² As pointed out by Gerow, the difference between *vyāpāra* (operation) and *phala* (result, fruit), being no other than the difference between the two senses of *karman*⁸³, is interpretive. In the classic example of *odanam pacati* (he cooks rice) cooked rice marks a stage in a process, and that stage is taken as the object of the action or process. The object is a specific point in the process, to which corresponds a certain name.

What Gerow does not notice, though, is that the action is also understood in relation to the expected fruit. To speak of an action like cooking, construes a

atha nadī kūlaṃ karṣatītyādau katham karmasaṃjñā? katham ca na syāt ? nadyāder acetanatvāt, acetanānām īpsāyā asambhavāt | naitad asti | atra nadīti padāntarasambandhād īpsāyā abhāvo 'cetasīyāpi bhāvaḥ pratīyate | na ca padasaṃskāre padāntarasambandhagamyo 'rtha upayujyate, tena kūlaṃ karṣatītyādāv icchāmātram āśritā vyāptiḥ, karma ca saṃskriyate | yadyapi paścān nadyā saha sambhandhād acetanatvam icchāyā abhāvaś ca pratīyate tathāpi ca tadbahiraṅgatvād antaraṅgasamjñākāryaṃ na śaknoti nivartayitum | anenaiva nyāyena yatra vyāptir nāsti, icchāmātraṃ ca kevalam, tatrāpi karmasaṃjñā bhavati, yathā grāmaṃ gantum icchāmi na ca me gamanaśaktir astīti || Nyāsa on karturīpsitatamaṃ karma.

Even more relevantly, though, see 1.5.6.

⁸¹ *karmajaṃ lokavaicitryaṃ cetanā tatkrtaṃ ca tat | cetanā mānasaṃ karma tajje vākkāyakarmaṇī || Abhidharmakośa 4.1.*

⁸² E. Gerow, 'What is karma (kṛm karmeti)? An exercise in Philosophical Semantics', in *Indologica Taurinensia*, Volume X, 1982 page 87-116. Interestingly, Gerow concludes by suggesting that a Buddhist philosophical framework is more in accordance with the grammatical sense of *karman*, rather than, as one may initially suppose, a framework derived from Vedic philosophies.

⁸³ That is, when we taken the second definition quoted by Vasubandhu, as *cetayitvā*, it accords with *vyāpāra*: one could say, though, that even *cetanā* counts as *vyāpāra*. From the point of view of the *Vaibhāṣika*, a present *cetanā* is necessarily a *kāritra* (activity), since being present means to be functional. From the *Sautrāntika* standpoint, without efficiency there is not even existence.

link of sense between a present condition, and a future one: without this teleology, the action would not be understood in the same way. For example, if the expected and desired result would be burnt rice instead of cooked rice, the same present situation would be described as ‘he is burning the rice’ as opposed to ‘he is cooking the rice’. Actions are, in this sense, dependently imputed on a particular teleology: *karman* as *vyāpāra* can only be understood in respect to a certain *phala* (result). Intentionality (and often, intention) towards a probable future, informs all speaking of actions (all sentences). When we bring *kriyā* and *karman* closer to each other, *cetanā* surfaces as interpretive act. In this sense, the structure of Abhidharmic cosmology mirrors the construction of sentential meaning within the *kāraṇa* system.

1.5.6 *Kāśikā*, and Jinendrabuddhi: *tathāyuktam cānīpsitam*

One more section of Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary on the *Nyāsa* supports my analysis of grammatical *karman* as being akin to intention only in terms of its structure: not in terms of an actual description of sentient events within the world.

The following *sūtra* is closely linked to the previous one. It ensures the applicability of ‘*karman*’ to cases where it cannot be said to be ‘desired’, or even desirable. Among other things, this section of Jinendrabuddhi’s commentary introduces a discussion of the two types of negations, *prasajya* and *paryudāsa*, an important distinction in *Madhyamaka*:

‘And what is not desired, linked in the same way’ (*tathāyuktam cānīpsitam*)

(*Kāśikā*.)

If that, which is not desired, is linked in the same way as the way through which that, which is most desired by the agent, is linked to the action, its designation as *karman* is enjoined. Whatever is other than the desired is ‘not-desired’, either detested or other. ‘He eats poison’.

‘He sees thieves’. ‘Going to the village, he passes by the roots of trees’.⁸⁴

(Jinendrabuddhi:)

The syllable ‘and’ (ca) is in the sense of limitation (*avadhāraṇa*). That is why, in the commentary, he says: ‘**in the same way**’.

If ‘not desired’ were to be a simple negation (*prasajyapratishedha*), then, in instances like ‘**going to the village, he passes by the roots of trees**’, there would be no designation as *karman* for the roots of trees and the like. Since, a simple negation being there, the designation of *karman* would be only enjoined for something ‘not-desired’. On the other hand; the roots of trees are not ‘desired’, because of coming about without prior intention. Nor are they ‘not-desired’: since, they are not unfavourable. Therefore, the designation as *karman* being enjoined for what is ‘not-desired’, it would not apply to those who are not ‘desired’, in the sense of *other than* the desired.⁸⁵

When we say ‘not desired’ the negation can be taken in two distinct senses. One sense refers to something, which we do not desire (*prasajyapratishedha*). The other refers to something, other than what we do desire (*paryudāsapratishedha*). If the first type of negation were to be applied to the definition, the latter could not cover instances, where the object of the action cannot be termed undesirable (un-wished-for), despite one’s absence of desire towards it.

On the other hand, an implicative negation being there, in this way the designation of *karman* is enjoined for that, which is other than the desired. And the roots of the trees, in the manner stated above, are other than the desired. Therefore, for them also the designation as *karman* is established.

⁸⁴ *yena prakāreṇa kartur īpsitatamaṁ kriyayā yuḥyate tenaiva cet prakāreṇa yad anīpsitaṁ yuktam bhavati tasya karmasaṁjñā vidhīyate | īpsitād anyat sarvaṁ anīpsitaṁ dveṣyam itarac ca | viṣaṁ bhakṣayati | caurān paśyati | grāmaṁ gacchan vṛkṣamūlāny upasarpati || Kāśikā on Tathāyuktam cānīpsitam.*

⁸⁵ *cakāro ’vadhāraṇe | ata eva vṛttāvāha tenaiveti | anīpsitaṁ iti | yady apy ayaṁ prasajyapratishedhaḥ syāt tadā grāmaṁ gacchan vṛkṣamūlāny upasarpatītyādaḥ vṛkṣamūlādīnāṁ karmasaṁjñā na syāt | tathā hi prasajyapratishedhe saty anena yogenānīpsitasyaiva karmasaṁjñā vidhīyate; vṛkṣamūlāni ca na tāvadīpsitāni pūrvam anabhisandhāya pravṛttau, nāpy anīpsitāni, apratikūlatvāt; tatas cānīpsitasya karmasaṁjñā vidhīyamānā teṣāṁ īpsitād anyatvenānīpsitān na syāt || Nyāsa on Tathāyuktam cānīpsitam.*

The type of negation, which positively refers to something other than what we desire, can cover all the instances at hand. What is other than the desired can be either positively un-wished-for, or also simply not intended.

Having observed this, to show how this is an implicative negation, he says
'other than the desired', and so on. And what is meant by 'and so on'?
It means something detestable, and so on. 'Detestable' is something unfavourable: like, poison, thieves and so on. 'Otherwise' means not unfavourable: the roots of trees, as stated above.⁸⁶

In this discussion, the most relevant point is that *karman* has nothing to do with the actual intention of an agent in the world: in fact, it is a relation which accrues even in the absence of intention, or when the intention is opposite. Hence, it has to be understood as a structural relationship between sentential elements.

1.6 The primary *kāra*kas and Buddhism

There are many areas of Buddhist philosophy where *kāra*ka definitions may be observed to have an influence. Some of them are the intricate debates, either within *Sautrāntika* and *Vaibhāṣika* or between *Yogācāra* and *Madhyamaka*, which I shall try to reconstruct in the next Chapters. In this section, though, I wish to analyse certain ideas, that constitute a widely shared common ground; and to show how *kāra*kas play an important role even in understanding such more foundational ideas.

⁸⁶ *paryudāse tu saty anena yogenepsitād anyasya karmasaṃjñā vidhīyate | bhavanti ca yathoktaprakāraṇi vṛkṣamūlānīpsitād anyāni; atas teṣāṃ api karmasaṃjñā sidhyatīty etad alocyā paryudāso 'yam iti darśayitum āha īpsitād anyad ityādi | kiṃ punas tad ity āha dveṣyam ityādi | dveṣyam pratikūlam yathā viṣacaurādi | itarad apratikūlam yathā uktaparakāraṇi vṛkṣamūlāni || Ibidem.*

1.6.1 The *kāra* system and basic Buddhist thought: selflessness

It is not rare to characterise the distinguishing trait of Buddhist thought as *nairātmya*, the doctrine of the absence of a ‘self’. This sets the Buddhist systems apart from other schools of Indian philosophy, and arguably is a common view shared by all Buddhist philosophers, despite remarkable differences in its interpretation.

A clear link between this doctrine and the *kāra* system could be taken as a sufficient corroboration of the latter’s importance for Buddhist thought as a whole. One philosopher has provided such a link, while commenting upon a popular and influential text of the *Mahāyāna*. Kamalaśīla’s unique position as an Indian *ācārya* at the peak of medieval scholastic culture, who also acquired legendary status in Tibetan Buddhist literature, makes his remarks most relevant and worth analysing.

Kamalaśīla has composed a detailed commentary on the *Vajracchedikāprajñāpāramitāsūtra*, where we find a discussion about selflessness, between the Buddha and Subhūti:

What do you think, Subhūti, does a Stream-Enterer think: ‘The fruit of entering the stream has been obtained by me’? Subhūti said: no, Blessed One. The Stream-Enterer does not think: ‘The fruit of entering the stream has been obtained by me.’⁸⁷

The discussion continues in the same vein, applying an analogous structure to the other stages of Buddhist realisation. But the mention of the Stream-Enterer is particularly significant, because ‘entering the stream’ means realising the path

⁸⁷ *tat kiṃ manyase subhūte api nu srotaāpannasyaivaṃ bhavati mayā srotaāpattiṃ phalaṃ prāptam iti | subhūtir āha no hīdaṃ bhagavan | na srotaāpannasyaivaṃ bhavati mayā srotaāpattiṃ phalaṃ prāptam iti ||*

of seeing: in other words, realising selflessness for the first time. It is at this juncture that Kamalaśīla's takes the phrasing of the *Sūtra* very seriously, and offers some of his most useful comments:

Here, the stream is defined as the path of seeing, which brings to the great city of *nirvāṇa*. 'Enterer' is one who has reached, one who has entered the stream which destroys all the afflictions to be destroyed through seeing. And it is shown that, since he has destroyed any attachment towards an agent, object of the action, or action, due to having realised that one thing depends on another, he has realised selflessness. 'By me' is attachment towards an agent. 'The fruit' is attachment towards the object of the action. 'Has been obtained' is attachment towards the action.⁸⁸

Apart from the crucial juncture at which these comments appear – between being an ordinary person and a 'Noble One' – some specific features of the *Sūtra*'s terminology make Kamalaśīla's choice of exegesis appropriate. The same analysis, in terms of *kāraka*, could apply to several other actions: but here we are specifically concerned with the action of *prāpti*, obtaining or reaching.

The object of the action (*karman*) was defined by Pāṇini and his commentators primarily as something to be *obtained* by the agent, through the action (as we have seen in this chapter): to the extent that a Buddhist grammarian, Candragomin, redefined *karman* as *āpya*, 'that which is to be obtained'.⁸⁹ The rest of Kamalaśīla's commentary on this passage centres upon the ultimate impossibility of a relation between something to be obtained and something

⁸⁸ *tatra srotaḥ nirvāṇamahānagaraprāpakadarśanamārgalakṣaṇam āpannaḥ prāptaḥ darśanapraheyasamastakleśaprahāyakaḥ srota āpanna itī tasya ca kartari karmaṇi kriyāyām cābhiniveśaprahāṇena idaṃpratyayatādhigamān nairātmyādhigamo darśitaḥ | mayā itī kartary abhiniveśaḥ | phalam itī karmaṇy abhiniveśaḥ | prāptaḥ itī kriyāyām abhiniveśaḥ ||* I feel some confidence in using this Sanskrit re-translation, especially regarding the last three sentences, where the possible variation is more limited and hence less relevant to the present discussion. Since my interest is in the understanding of the analysis in terms of Sanskrit syntax, I would anyhow have to provide my own Sanskrit re-translation, even if I were to use the Tibetan text.

⁸⁹ Consider that *vyāpti* and *prāpti* are partial synonyms, derived from the same root *√āp*.

which obtains: *prāpya* and *prāpaka*. This is the object-agent relation par-excellence, and Kamalaśīla explicitly mentions that his analysis should be extended to all other analogous cases: ‘Through this, all the usages such as object of the action, agent and so forth, should be clearly understood’.⁹⁰ The paradox of a selfless action, like the ‘obtainment’ of the path of seeing, is that it is an action, with an object and an agent, only from an outsider’s perspective.

1.6.2 The *kāraka* system and the *Mahāyāna*: the purification of the three spheres

The *Mahāyāna* is at times termed *pāramitāyāna*, the Vehicle of the Perfections. This highlights that, in brief, engaging in this Vehicle means to practice the six (or, ten) perfections until the attainment of Buddhahood.

Among the perfections, the perfection of discriminative knowledge or *prajñāpāramitā* plays a special role, as both *sūtras* and *śāstras* explain. It is stated that without applying *prajñāpāramitā*, the other five could not even be called ‘perfections’, being no more than causes of ‘worldly’ merit⁹¹. Yet, how to apply the perfection of *prajñā* to the others? It is here, that the role of *kāraka* system should be observed.

When any of the other five perfections are practiced, they become joined with the *prajñāpāramitā* only if the aspiring bodhisattva applies the ‘purification of the three spheres’ or ‘does not apprehend the three spheres’. In the case of the perfection of giving (the first) this means ‘not apprehending triads like a giver, a

⁹⁰ *anena tāvat sarvaḥ karmakartrādivyavahāraḥ spaṣṭam avaboddhavyaḥ* | *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ On this, see especially Prajñākaramati’s commentary to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.1, translated as an Appendix in this thesis.

gift and a recipient'⁹²: in terms of *kāraḥas*, an agent (*karṭṛ*), object of the action (*karman*), and recipient (*upādāna*). In other words, when even the most fundamental *yoga* of a practitioner in the *Mahāyāna* is explained, it is in terms of non-apprehending ordinary and foundational categories of syntax, the *kāraḥas*. This may be because it is the most fundamental syntax, through which a world and actions within a world are conventionally perceived.

There is a slight variation in regards to the *kāraḥas* actually referred to in the case of the perfection of giving, and the triad of *kāraḥas* which was analysed in Kamalaśīla's commentary. This is probably due to the fact that *upādānakāraḥa* (the recipient) is bound to appear only in the case of giving, and will not fit the context of the other perfections. This variation justifies the appearance of the word *ādi* (etc., and so on) attached to both lists: we can safely say that in both cases 'etc.' means 'or any of the other *kāraḥas*' (since what appears in one list and not in the other is just an alternative *kāraḥa* relation). And of course, the 'non-apprehension of the three spheres' is a realisation of emptiness, the selflessness seen by the Stream-Enterer on the path of seeing.

1.7 Continued agency and dependent arising

A way in which Sanskrit can express two consecutive actions is through the suffix *ktvā*, or it substitute *lyap* (when the root has a prefix). Its usage is regulated by the *sūtra*: *saṁānakarṭṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle*, which literally means: 'In reference to a preceding time, for two things with the same agent' these suffixes are employed.

What this means is that, in a sentence like *gṛhaṁ gatvā rāmaḥ khādati*, *gatvā* (having gone) represents a chronologically anterior action and must have the

⁹² *dāṭṛdeyapratigrāhakādītritayānupalabhaḡena* ||

same agent as *khādati* (he eats). Hence the sentence can be translated as: 'having gone home, *Rāma* eats.'

This constructions show how an analysis in terms of agents better suits the structure of Sanskrit. We could have the sentence: *grhaṁ gatvā rāmeṇa sītā dṛṣṭā*. Here, the agent is still *Rāma*: although, he is no more the subject. In English, we may try to translate the sentence as: 'having gone home, *Sītā* was seen by *Rāma*', but the sentence would actually suggest that it was *Sītā* who has gone home. This is because, these English constructions tend to imply sameness of the grammatical subject; while, in Sanskrit, the *ktvā* suffix unambiguously has to refer to the same agent.

This *sūtra*, though, offers an interesting interpretive problem. We have seen that *kāraḥ* are to be understood as capacities, syntactical relations rather than actual referents. On the other hand, when we talk of the same agent in different actions, we cannot be talking of the same capacity, since capacities differ for different actions. Jinendrabuddi offers the following hypothetical objection:

A *kāraḥ* is a capacity, and the capacity of the action in the anterior time is other from that of the action in the subsequent time. Then, how is it that sameness of agent is acknowledged?⁹³

This view of *kāraḥ*, incidentally, is the same as Candrakīrti's own (as shown and discussed by Bhattacharya).⁹⁴ It is in tune with understanding *kāraḥ* as structural categories, thus of fundamental importance and broad applicability, as opposed to more specified stances on agency. Yet, in this case, 'agent' cannot just mean a capacity.

⁹³ *nanu śaktiḥ kāraḥ anyā ca pūrvakālakriyāyāḥ śaktiḥ anyā cottarakālakriyāyāḥ tat kutaḥ samānakartṛkatvaṁ vijñāyate* || Nyāsa on *Samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle*.

⁹⁴ Kamaleshwar Bhattacharya, 'Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion: their grammatical basis', in Kamaleshwar Bhattacharya et al., *A corpus of Indian studies. Essays in honour of Professor Gaurinath Sastri*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1980.

The *Kāśikā* offers the following solution: for once, we have to disregard the distinction between a capacity and a capacity-possessor, so that the expression ‘agent’ may apply even for the same element through different actions. Jinendrabuddhi explains:

The one who is the substratum of the capacity and the capacity itself – here the difference between these two is not wished to be expressed. Therefore, the substratum of the capacity is only one, Devadatta the agent, and he is one and the same for both the actions, so, sameness of agent is fit.⁹⁵

The question here is whether this *sūtra* gives to the category ‘agent’ a stronger semantic weight than it usually has. It is plausibly the case: and this may make it less flexible than the primary *kāraka* definitions so far discussed.

Anna Radicchi has pointed out how this rule clashes with basic premises of Buddhist ontology, since most of the Buddhist schools reject the idea of a permanent agent in the first place.⁹⁶ Most Buddhist authors, though, solve the apparent difficulty by ascribing it to different levels of discourse. I will offer some specific examples linked to the proper analysis of the term ‘dependent arising.’

The latter is one of the best candidates for the title of the central doctrine of Buddhism.⁹⁷ The Sanskrit word for dependent arising is *pratītyasamutpāda*, a

⁹⁵ *yaś ca śaktyādhāro yā ca śaktis tayoṛ iha bhedo na vivakṣitaḥ | tena śaktyādhāra eka eva devadattaḥ karttā sa cobhayor api kriyayor eka eveti yuktam samānakartṛkatvam || Nyāsa on Samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle.*

⁹⁶ See: Anna Radicchi, ‘Two Buddhist Grammarians: Candragomin and Jayāditya’, in Madhav M. Deshpande and Peter E. Hook (eds.), *Indian Linguistic Studies. Festschrift in Honor of George Cardona*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002.

⁹⁷ As the *Śālistambasūtra* puts it: ‘One, who sees dependent arising, sees the Dharma; one, who sees the Dharma, sees the Buddha’.

compound, where the element *pratītya* is commonly understood as ending in *lyap*.

1.7.1 The *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on *pratītyasamutpāda*

Vasubandhu analyses the problems in interpreting the term *pratītyasamutpāda* in his commentary to *kārikā* 3.28. The first alternative that he proposes is that, in fact, the word *pratītya* should be taken as a *lyap*, and that its meaning should be identical to ‘having obtained’ (*prāpya*). Hence, the overall meaning of *pratītyasamutpāda* should be: arising after having obtained a condition.⁹⁸

This interpretation, though, gives rise to an apparent paradox. The suffix *lyap*, as we have seen, refers to the same agent performing two consecutive actions. In this case, the same agent should first perform the action of obtaining conditions (*pratītya*) and then, the action of arising (*samutpāda*). But if it has not yet arisen, how could it perform an action?

This objection is brought out rather clearly by Vasubandhu, who even quotes an unidentified verse criticising this interpretation of *pratītyasamutpāda*: which suggests that the debate was well-known at his time.⁹⁹ Yaśomitra identifies the objectors as *Sautrāntikas*, and explains the link with Pāṇini’s syntactical rules:

‘Because the suffix *ktvā* is employed in reference to an action at a preceding time’: this is because it has been said that it is for ‘the

⁹⁸ *pratyayaṃ prāpya samudbhavaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ* || *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.28.

⁹⁹ If ‘it obtains before arising’, this is not fit; if ‘together’, the suffix *ktvā* is not established in reference to such a meaning, since it is employed in reference to anterior time.
pratyeti pūrvam utpādāt yady asattvān na yujyate | saha cet ktvā na siddho ’tra pūrvakālaviddhānataḥ || Quoted in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.28.

preceding time, with same agents', and according to the *Sautrāntika* opinion, nothing whatsoever exists before its own arising.
'And there is no action without an agent': because an action is established when an agent is there.¹⁰⁰

The first solution offered to this qualm is that the agent of 'obtaining' (expressed by *prāṭītya*) is a future dharma about to arise (*utpādābhimukho'nāgataḥ*), a solution available to the *Vaibhāṣika*, who upholds the existence of dharmas in the three times.

In this context, Vasubandhu also explains that the grammatical explanation of agency cannot apply literally:

Moreover, the following is incomplete: the grammatical way to explain an agent and an action as 'something exists' being the agent and 'existence' being the action: here we do not see any action of 'existence' other from the referent of 'the one who exists'.¹⁰¹

This possibility is also strengthened by quoting a verse, where it is shown that the suffix *ktvā* (or *lyap*, by extension) can also be used in reference to simultaneity, as when saying that 'reaching a lamp, darkness is gone' (*dīpaṃ prāpya tamo gatam*).¹⁰²

The last point is particularly important, as grammarians themselves accept that the meaning of words is to be ascertained from 'the world', and in certain cases

¹⁰⁰ *pūrvakālāyāṃ kriyāyāṃ ktvāvidher iti | samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle iti vacanāt | na cāsau pūrvam utpādāt kaścid astīti sautrāntikamatena | na cāpy akartṛkāsti kriyeti kartari sati kriyāyā vyavasthāpanāt ||* Sub-commentary on *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.28.

¹⁰¹ *anīṣpannaṃ cedāṃ yaduta śābdikīyaṃ kartṛkriyā vyavasthānaṃ bhavatīty eṣa kartā bhūtir ity eṣā kriyā | na cātra bhavitur arthāt bhūtim anyāṃ kriyāṃ paśyāmaḥ ||* *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on 3.28.

¹⁰² Even in reference to simultaneity, moreover, there is *ktvā*: 'having obtained a light, the darkness is gone'; 'having opened the mouth wide, he sleeps'. If you say that the last refers to something happening after, how would it not refer to it (the mouth) being closed?
sahabhāve 'pi ca ktvā 'sti dīpaṃ prāpya tamo gatam | āsyaṃ vyādāya śete vā paścāc cet kiṃ na saṃvyṛte || Quoted in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 3.28.

later grammarians have had to add to the usages listed by Pāṇini (whose lists are therefore, in principle, not normatively exclusive).

The second solution, ascribed by Yaśomitra to Bhadanta Śrīlabha, is to take *ītya* in *pratītya* not as a *lyap*, but as a noun meaning ‘things which are bound to go, to vanish’. Vasubandhu, though, points out that in instances other than the compound *pratītyasamutpāda*, this interpretation does not fit with available usages of *pratītya*, as in ‘in dependence upon (*pratītya*) the eye and visible forms, the eye-consciousness arises’.¹⁰³

1.7.2 The debate in the *Prasannapadā*

The proper understanding of the term *pratītyasamutpāda* is the subject matter of a lengthy debate in Candrakīrti’s commentary on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 1.1-1.2. Here too, the issue at stake is the proper grammatical understanding of the first member, *pratītya*. The discussions seem to be mostly derived from the one in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, and Candrakīrti’s stance is very close to Vasubandhu’s own.

Candrakīrti proposes that *pratītya* is a *lyap* form, meaning ‘having reached’ and by extension ‘depending upon’. To support his claims, Candrakīrti quotes the same passage quoted by Vasubandhu (‘in dependence upon the eye and visible form, eye-consciousness arises’).¹⁰⁴ He also criticises Bhāvaviveka’s interpretation, claiming that it shows a ‘lack of skill in repeating other’s positions’ (*parapakṣānuvādākuśalatvam*). The primary reason is that

¹⁰³ *caḥṣuḥ pratītya rūpāṇi cotpadyate caḥsurvijñānam* || Quoted in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on 3.28.

¹⁰⁴ *caḥṣuḥ pratītya rūpaṇi ca utpadyate caḥsurvijñānam*

Bhāvaviveka states that even those who accept the first interpretation of *pratītya* as a *lyap* take *prati* in the sense of dispersion or vanishing (*vīpsā*): which, Candrakīrti states, is not the case. This point becomes more comprehensible if we take the debate in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* as the background, where, in effect, those who take *prati* in the sense of dispersion or vanishing (*vīpsā*) are only the second group. Candrakīrti's objection has force only inasmuch as it takes for granted that his opponent is also reconstructing the various positions of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*: incidentally, this supports my claim, that several *Madhyamaka* debates are continuations of the debates in the *Kośa*, as it will be fully demonstrated in the next three Chapters.

Candrakīrti, not unlike Vasubandhu, offers a less literal understanding of the underlying Pāṇinian rule, by stating that *pratītya* means 'in dependence upon causes and conditions' (*hetupratyayāpekṣā*). The chronological sense of *lyap* (enjoined in Pāṇini's *sūtra*) is lost: yet we must remember that this *sūtra* offers, even from a grammarian's stance, a unique and less technical handling of the *kāraṇas*.

1.7.3 *Mādhyamika* authors: more on the same issue

Pratītyasamutpāda applies to a wide variety of contexts and can be used to analyse either virtually any dharma. Nonetheless, the 'twelve limbs of dependent arising' are more specifically concerned with the topic of the cycle of birth and death, and are arguably the most recurrent focus of analysis throughout Buddhist philosophical literature.

Even in *Madhyamaka*, as I shall more extensively argue, the primary locus of dependent arising is between successive lives. This is the topic of the last chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, the Examination of Views.

It is in that context, that Candrakīrti employs an expression containing a *ktvā* form:

kuśalaṃ karma kṛtvā devagatiṃ gacchati |

Having done virtuous *karman*, he goes to the gods' realm.¹⁰⁵

By the rule *samānakartṛkayoḥ pūrvakāle*, the one who does the *karman* and the one who goes to the gods' realm must be the same. Yet, Candrakīrti is bent on refuting such sameness of the agent, following the gist of Nāgārjuna's verse upon which he is commenting.

This may not be a serious philosophical problem for the *Mādhyamika*. The two consecutive assertions (the same agent does good *karman* and goes to the gods' realm, vs., there is no sameness of agency) can be distributed into two different levels of truth (conventional and ultimate). Thus, conventionally there is the same agent performing *karman* and reaping the fruit, but ultimately the one who act and reaps the result cannot be established as identical or as different.

Haribhadra offers a variant of the same problem, where the discussion is restricted to two consecutive instants. He is commenting upon a passage in the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, where it is stated that first one rejoices, then, one dedicates the merit. Yet, the sameness implied by the usage of *ktvā* seems at odds with the Buddhist premises that mind is momentary:

¹⁰⁵ *Prasannapadā* on *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 27.15.

By accepting their succession, it is accepted that the two thoughts of rejoicing and dedication are not there in one and the same instant. Therefore, if one were to say that, since the affix *ktvā* is employed when we have the same agent, the very same mind having first rejoiced (*anumodya*) successively dedicates: this would make no sense. Since there is no efficiency of what is permanent either gradually or at once, due to its momentariness the rejoicing mind is not there in the instant of dedication. Therefore, how could it then dedicate?¹⁰⁶

Haribhadra's solution seems fairly straight forward: the rule has no force in terms of more fine analysis, and considerations about the actual quality of mind take precedence. Again, this is not dissimilar from Vasubandhu's and Candrakīrti's stances.

The relatively weak authority of this *sūtra* in the instances presented so far may seem to contradict my argument for the importance of the *kāraḥ*. Moreover, it may misleadingly suggest that Buddhist authors had troubles specifically with rules about continued agency, merely because of their specific philosophical stance about impermanence.

Yet, it must be remembered that the *sūtra* itself employs the category agent in an exceptional, technically 'loose' sense, different from its sense in the main definition: hence this does affect the considerations made about the main *kāraḥ*. As we have seen, moreover, the occurrence of this extended sense of *karṭṛ* (as capacity-possessor rather than capacity itself) was used because this instance of continued agency posed a difficulty even to the grammatical commentators, for reasons not ascribable to a specific view of impermanence.

The difficulties arise, in effect, because the *sūtra* employs the term agent (*karṭṛ*)

¹⁰⁶ [...] *pūrvāparyapratipādanān naikasmin kṣaṇe dvāv anumodanāpariṇāmanāmanaskārau bhavata itī pradīpādītā | tasmāt samānakarṭṛtve ktvāpratyayavidhānād ekam eva cittaṁ pūrvam anumodya paścāt pariṇāmayatīty uktān cet/ tac ca ayuktam | yato nityasya kramayaugapadyābhyām arthakriyāvirodhāt, kṣaṇikatvena anumodakān cittaṁ pariṇāmanākṣaṇe nāsti | atas tena kathān pariṇāmayati || Abhisamayālaṁkāraṇīyā on the Puṇyānumodanā Chapter.*

in a way more charged and less flexible than its ordinary *kāraka* sense: which poses a difficulty not only to Buddhist Abhidharma, but also to grammarians.

1.8 Conclusion

The apparently contingent and negligible fact that a Sanskrit text is bound to use *kāraka* structures and terminology, carries important implications. This can be evinced from all of what is lost, and added, once we translate the ideas found in the Sanskrit texts into English.

If one chooses a looser rendering, by translating *kartṛ* as ‘subject’ and *karman* as ‘object’, this obscures the way in which the texts understand and speak of actions (the ‘subject’ of English grammar does not always correspond to the agent:) when in a philosophical context, it may amount to a modification of the arguments presented.¹⁰⁷

The word ‘agent’ may carry the unwanted suggestion of a person, while we have seen how this category is far more flexible and inclusive: this will become clearer in the next Chapter, where its usages in the *Abhidharma* will be discussed at some length. The usage of *kāraṅgas*, as opposed to a subject-grammar analysis, has a definite bearing on the content of the texts, and cannot be taken as a replaceable linguistic accident. The expectable implication is that a greater sensitivity to the underlying *kāraka* syntax must result in a more precise and nuanced comprehension of the arguments presented in the Sanskrit. If for one reason or another one glosses over the subtlety of the grammatical analysis

¹⁰⁷ This is particularly noticeable in the presentation of *Yogācāra* found in most secondary sources, where the system is often depicted as doing away with the ‘subject-object’ dichotomy. On the other hand, what *Yogācāra* denies is the reality of *grāhya* and *grāhaka*, *karman* and *kartṛ* respectively. It is the ‘absence of the two’ (*advaya*) as opposed to ‘non-dualism’, a rendering which carries the unwanted suggestion of a position of oneness.

involved, it is likely that the arguments themselves will be reconstructed in a simplistic manner, that does no justice to their intended sophistication.

In the next Chapters, I will show more technical and intricate ways in which the *kāraṇa* system influences philosophical argumentation, in *Abhidharma*, *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*. While in the present Chapter I have focused the discussion on certain premises shared by practically all Buddhist systems, in the rest of the thesis I will try to show how the *kāraṇa* system influences further debates among the various schools and authors.

Vyākaraṇa, and the *kāraṇa* system in particular, help understanding and forming conventions: one could even say that they constitute their underlying structure. Even comprehending the selflessness or emptiness of conventions passes through *kāraṇas*, and in this sense their double role in the world of dependently arisen *dharma*s and empty imputations resembles that of *lakṣaṇas* and *lakṣya*s: as we will see in the next Chapters.

Chapter 2

Abhidharma as a dictionary:

the world, in Buddhist terms

Abhidharma is stainless *prajñā* with its adjuncts,
the other that helps acquire it, as also the *śāstra*.
Since here we enter its meaning and since this
supports it, we call it ‘Sheath’ (or ‘Treasury’) of *Abhidharma*.¹⁰⁸

Without grouping the *dharma*s,
there is no means to pacify the afflictions,
and due to the afflictions, a person roams here in the sea of existence:
thus, for that reason, this has *indeed* been spoken by the Teacher.¹⁰⁹

These two stanzas are from the opening verses of Vasubandhu’s *Abhidharmakośa*. They carry two implications: *Abhidharma* resembles grammar and, it resembles a dictionary. It resembles grammar, because it is analysis, grouping of the *dharma*s. As we have seen in Chapter 1, the etymological sense of *vyākaraṇa* brings it close to *dharmapracaya* (grouping the *dharma*s), a synonym of *prajñā*, and hence, of *Abhidharma*. The etymological similarities mirror an actual analogy in the procedures of classical grammar and Buddhist *Abhidharma*: they are not mere accidents of word-formation.

Moreover, a *Kośa* of any type is, primarily, a dictionary: the image of a treasury suggests a repository, from which valuable knowledge may be extracted. This knowledge consists in the ascertainment of something meaning something else,

¹⁰⁸ *prajñā 'malā sānucarā 'bhidharmas tatprāptaye yāpi ca yacca śāstram | tasyārthato 'smiṇ samanuṣṭeṣāt sa cāśrayo 'syety abhidharmakośaḥ || Abhidharmakośa 1.2.*

¹⁰⁹ *dharmāṇāṃ pravacayamantareṇa nāsti kleśānāṃ yata upasāntaye 'bhyupāyaḥ | kleśaiś ca bhramati bhavārṇave 'tra lokas taddhetor ata udītaḥ kilaṣa śāstrā || Abhidharmakośa 1.3.*

in learning synonyms. Giving synonyms is what not only a writer of a dictionary, but also a philosophical commentator, is bound to do.

Such procedure does not only improve one's command of a certain language, even a philosophical language: by teaching synonyms, a text may explicate its referents in the world. If the reader has no mental association between a word and its referent, this will be induced by employing another term sharing the same referent. We have seen that, by the grammarians' own dictum, grammar is concerned with words (*śabdās*) and not referents (*arthas*). The same is not true of *Kośas*, dictionaries, which refer to a world outside the text. The *Amarakośa* is the prototype of a comprehensive thesaurus, and its study is taken as crucial for a proper grounding in Sanskrit: Pāṇini and Amara are the 'parents' of one's knowledge of the language.¹¹⁰ The dictionary gives the meanings, grammar tells us the structure.

The *Amarakośa* is a good example of a generic lexicon: as such, we may find it employed by literary commentators to explain the sense of difficult words in a poem. Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* plays a similar role, within a different context: it is a specialised, as opposed to a generic, dictionary. The definitions given in the *Abhidharmakośa* are quoted by Buddhist authors for the same purpose that a literary commentator may quote Amara: to refer the reader to a commonly accepted definition of a term. The parallel between the two *Kośas* is therefore not only structural: both were used to the same ends (and, both were very popular).

¹¹⁰ Incidentally, the author of the *Amarakośa* is considered to have been Buddhist: the propitiatory verse strongly suggests a dedication to the Buddha, as it is dedicated to the 'Ocean of knowledge and compassion' (*jñānadayāsindhu*). The earliest commentator, Jātarūpa, identifies the latter as *bhagavān*, and since Jātarūpa can be safely identified as a Buddhist author, here this must be taken as a synonym of the Buddha. See Mahes Raj Pant, (ed.), *Jātarūpa's commentary on the Amarakośa*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000.

Root texts of *Abhidharma*, perhaps starting from mnemonic *mātrkāś*, are lists of the ultimately existent constituents of the cosmos.¹¹¹ They are, though, interpreting the *Sūtras* and often quoting them as support. If an utterance of the *Sūtras* is preserved in Sanskrit, the first level of understanding will depend on the strictures of the language as regulated in the *Aṣṭādhyāyī*, while the full implications of its meaning will have to be drawn out by relying upon the ultimate referents of the words. Thus, the *Sūtra*'s statements can be translated into a more ontologically accurate language, by providing synonyms and analytical expansions. This is what the *Bhāṣya* and the sub-commentaries do, linking the root stanzas to passages in the *Sūtras*, through the medium of Pāṇini's rules.

The first term to be explained in the *Abhidharmakośa* is *abhidharma*, a synonym of discriminating knowledge or *prajñā*. By grouping (*pravacaya*) the whole of existence into discrete *dharma*s, afflictions will be removed, and with them suffering. Deconstructing persons and things into fleeting constituents, the *Abhidharma* ascertains the absence of any permanent 'self'; it counteracts the unknowing superimposition of a substantial core.

Grouping *dharma*s is possible only as far as the difference between them can be ascertained. *Abhidharma* is an exercise in clarifying distinctions: it is identification and analysis. What identifies a *dharma*, is called *lakṣaṇa*.

¹¹¹ For a discussion about mnemonic devices and oral transmission in the Pali tradition, see Lance S. Cousins, 'Pali Oral Literature', in Paul Williams, (ed.), *Buddhism. Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, London: Routledge 2005. For a more detailed account of the possible origin of *Abhidharma* texts, see Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas. Early Buddhist Theories on Existence*, Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995, pages 7-10. And also: Leo Pruden (tr.), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* by Louis de La Vallée Poussin, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, pages xxx-lxi.

The sense of the word *lakṣaṇa* oscillates between a characteristic and a definition. This is partly due to the derivational root √*lakṣ*, which can mean to perceive or observe, to notice, to mark, to characterise, and also, to aim at. A *lakṣaṇa* is both something noticed, as well as the notice of something else.

The *Abhidharmakośa* makes lists of *dharma*s and then, like a dictionary, provides definitions: the *lakṣaṇa*s themselves are in this case the synonyms. Here we see a difference between this procedure and that of Amara. The latter was concerned with recording pre-existent usages; Vasubandhu intends to give (and, in the *Bhāṣya*, to discuss), precise definitions of the ultimate existent *dharma*s. The lists of synonyms in the *Amarakośa* could hardly be called *lakṣaṇa*s. In this sense, the *Abhidharmakośa* includes an element of analysis closer to *vyākaraṇa*.

A *dharma* is itself defined as what upholds its own *lakṣaṇa* (*svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharma*).¹¹² This is what the *Abhidharma* is mostly concerned with: we could therefore expect that its authors should be termed as the experts on *lakṣaṇa*s. Yet, even Vasubandhu employed the term *lākṣaṇikāḥ* specifically for grammarians.¹¹³

The reasons could well be found in the predominant usages of his time. There is also an etymological justification, since as we have seen in Chapter 1, *lakṣaṇa* is one of the synonyms of *vyākaraṇa*. Perhaps, though, Vasubandhu implies that grammarians are the primary authority when trying to understand the sense of an expression; even while commenting on another set of *lakṣaṇa*s. As far as their referents are concerned, the definitions found in *Abhidharma* may be the

¹¹² *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on *Kārikā* 1.2.

¹¹³ *svatantraḥ kartā iti kartṛlakṣaṇam ācakṣate lākṣaṇikāḥ* || *Pudgalaviniścaya* section, see below.

most precise: yet, as far as the forming of those very definitions is concerned, grammar is a more fundamental concern.

Here we find a rather complex situation: *Abhidharma* resembles both a lexicon and grammar, and moreover, it employs the latter to form and assess its own content. Grammar has a double role in the *Abhidharma*: it is a set of rules explicitly referred to, and it is a blueprint in style and analytical procedure. And of course it is the regulated articulation of the structure of the language employed. We may understand this as a question of *lakṣaṇas* and the elaborate intersection of different sets of *lakṣaṇas*.¹¹⁴

The *Kośa* contains a few portions which are especially relevant in this respect. I will attempt to reconstruct Vasubandhu's lengthy and rather technical discussion about the status and nature of *lakṣaṇas* themselves. There is moreover an explicit meeting point between grammar and *Abhidharma*, when the category *agent* is discussed in the *Kośa*. This reappears as a *kāraka* in the discussion, but not with the unanimous consent of all debaters.

The debates here represented have rather direct links to those between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* that will be analysed in the next sections of this thesis. I hope to show that they are in fact a useful and relevant background, and the continuity between older and newer debates may help clarify the latter.

¹¹⁴ Ronkin has highlighted how definability is a central concern for the whole of the *Abhidhamma/Abhidharma* tradition, identifying it as a weakness that called for later critiques by *Mahāyāna* thinkers (specifically, she points to the *metabasis* from epistemology to ontology within *dharma* analysis). See Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics*, Oxford: Routledge Curzon, 2005, especially pages 248-252.

2.1 *Dharma*: what upholds its own *lakṣaṇa*

Dharma has been appropriately identified by Stcherbatsky as a cardinal concept in Buddhist thought.¹¹⁵ This is particularly true of the *Abhidharma*, and despite this fact, Stcherbatsky noticed how this term remains an elusive source of elaborate debates. A good starting point, though, is the definition of *dharma* quoted in the initial section of this Chapter.

The *Kośa* resorts to *lakṣaṇa* even in its (etymological) expansion of the word *dharma*. The latter is derived from the root *dhṛ*, meaning to uphold or maintain: each *dharma* is so called, because it upholds its own characteristic (*svalakṣaṇadhāraṇāt*).¹¹⁶

Some of Yaśomitra's remarks clarify the sense of the definition.¹¹⁷ He tells us that:

- i. there are two types of *lakṣaṇas*;
- ii. the *dharma*s are not themselves *lakṣaṇas*, but *lakṣya*: not characteristics but characterised.

¹¹⁵ Theodore Stcherbatsky, *Central Conception of Buddhism*, Delhi, India: Motilal Banarsidass, 1970.

¹¹⁶ *svalakṣaṇadhāraṇād dharmāḥ* || *Bhāṣya* on *Abhidharmakośa* 1.2b. For an account of the *Theravāda Abhidhamma* understanding of *lakkhaṇa*, see Noa Ronkin, *Early Buddhist Metaphysics*, Oxford: Routledge Curzon, 2005, especially the Conclusion.

¹¹⁷ 'Or the *lakṣaṇa* of *dharma*s': the specific and common characteristics, like 'the earth element has the characteristic of hardness', 'impermanent, suffering' and so on. *dharmalakṣaṇaṃ veti | svasāmānyalakṣaṇam 'khakkhaṭalakṣaṇaḥ pṛthivīdhātuh'*, 'anityaṃ duḥkham' ityevaṃ ādi || *Bhāṣya* 1.1, sub-commentary. And also:

it is not that this is a *dharma* being the *lakṣaṇa* of another. What then? It is a *lakṣya*, being in itself proximate.

na tv anyāṃ dharmo 'nyasya lakṣaṇam, kiṃ tarhi? lakṣyaḥ, svayam evābhimukhyāt || *Ibidem*.

The two types of *lakṣaṇas* are: specific characteristics (*svalakṣaṇas*) and common characteristics (*sāmānyalakṣaṇas*). An example of the first is the hardness of the earth-element, while the second type is exemplified by traits like impermanence or pain, common to all compounded *dharmas*.¹¹⁸ From the point of view of fine analysis, specific characteristics are more important, as they allow distinguishing between various types of compounded factors. Nevertheless, a set of common characteristics came to be identified as the *lakṣaṇas* par excellence: so much so that, in this case, they constituted *dharmas* in their own right, *lakṣyas* as well as *lakṣaṇas* – at least according to the *Vaibhāṣika* view.

2.1.1 The four *lakṣaṇas* of all compounded factors¹¹⁹

Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* oscillates between *Vaibhāṣika* positions and their *Sautrāntika* critiques.¹²⁰ Traditional accounts record that first, the author composed the verses alone and sent them to his *Vaibhāṣika* teacher in Kashmir. As the verses expounded their own position quite faithfully, the teacher was pleased. Next, though, Vasubandhu sent his commentary, where he favours the

¹¹⁸ The terminology of *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* appears in *pramāṇavāda* text also, from Dignāga onwards, but often in a different sense from its usage in the *Abhidharma*.

¹¹⁹ For another reconstruction of this section and an excellent discussion, focusing on different areas and on a comparison with the Theravāda, see: Y. Karunadasa, 'The Theravada Version of the Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness', in *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 1, Centre for Buddhist Studies: Sri Lanka, 2003, pages 120-185.

¹²⁰ I use the term *Sautrāntika* in its late sense of a recognisable group with a specific theoretical view, glossing over the problem of the reciprocal relation between *Sautrāntika* and *Dārṣṭāntika*. The latter has indeed some relevance in understanding Vasubandhu's precise stance, but for the sake of simplicity I prefer to refrain from introducing a complex debate within the body of the text. For a discussion of this issue, see Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas. Early Buddhist Theories on Existence*, Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995, pages 37-41.

Sautrāntika criticism of many *Vaibhāṣika* tenets: this angered the scholars, some of whom set to the task of rectifying his deviations.¹²¹

The section on the four *lakṣaṇas* is especially in tune with the spirit of this account, since we see a marked difference between reading the *kārikā* in isolation, or reading it with the commentary.¹²² The stanzas of the *Kośa* accord with the *Vaibhāṣika* stance on the *lakṣaṇas*, while the commentary points out their futility. Those who accept them are compromising on cogency for the sake of tradition: 'Do we not eat sweets, just because of a few flies?'¹²³

The discussion on the four characteristics takes a *Sūtra* passage as its starting point:

These are the three characteristics of the compounded: which three?
For something compounded, Monks, arising is cognised, passing away
is also cognised, and also, the modification of its abiding.¹²⁴

The *Sūtra* speaks of only three characteristics: arising (*utpāda*), passing away (*vyaya*) and modification of abiding (*sthityanyathātvam*). *Vaibhāṣikas*, on the other hand, accept four *lakṣaṇas*: birth (*jāti*), decay (*jarā*), abiding (*sthiti*), and impermanence (*anityatā*). The third seems to have been left out in the *Sūtra*

¹²¹ E. Obermiller (tr.), *The History of Buddhism in India and Tibet*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1986, pages 142-147.

¹²² The following discussion is based on *Abhidharmakośa* 2.45b-46, together with the *Bhāṣya* and Yaśomitra's commentary. I have for the most followed the order of the arguments as they appear, although I have highlighted and expanded upon what seemed most relevant to the concerns of this thesis.

¹²³ 'It is not that, thinking that flies are falling on them, one does not eat sweets. Therefore, one should counteract the faults and follow the established tenets.' *na hi makṣikāḥ patantīti modakā na bhakṣyante | tasmād doṣeṣu pratividhātavyaṁ siddhāntaś cānusartavyaḥ || Bhāṣya* to *Abhidharmakośa* 2.46.

¹²⁴ As quoted in full by Yaśomitra: *trīṇmāni bhikṣavaḥ saṁskṛtasya saṁskṛtalakṣaṇāni | katamāni trīṇi ? saṁskṛtasya bhikṣavaḥ utpādo 'pi prajñāyate, vyayo 'pi prajñāyate, sthityanyathātvam api ||*

passage.¹²⁵ Two solutions are offered to reconcile the Abhidharmic position with their source.

According to the first, 'abiding' (*sthiti*) has actually been left out. Only those characteristics, which are linked to bringing compounded factors into the three times, have been mentioned: birth brings the *saṃskāras* from the future to the present time, decay and impermanence bring them from the present to the past. This is according to the *Vaibhāṣika* doctrine that *dharma*s exist in the three times, but their activity (*kāritra*) is actualised in the present moment alone: thus, the three *lakṣaṇas* mediate between supra-temporal existence and the instantiation of a momentary activity.

In the nature (*svabhāva*) of *dharma*s, *Vaibhāṣikas* distinguish between existence (*bhāva*) and activity (*kāritra*). An existent *dharma* whose activity has yet to occur is future. When causes and conditions assemble and the same *dharma* becomes active, it is present, while when the activity has ceased, it becomes an existent past *dharma*. The three characteristics deliver dependent origination through time, as activity.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Notice that Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, Chapter 7, speaks only of three *lakṣaṇas* (*utpāda*, *sthiti*, *bhāṅga*), not four. On the other hand, an argument based on the secondary *lakṣaṇas* is introduced, the latter being a feature of *Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma* (possibly, if we accept Candrakīrti's identification, taken from the *Sāmmitiya*). Although most of Nāgārjuna's arguments seem to take their starting point from *Vaibhāṣika*-like categories, the type of *Vaibhāṣika* represented in the *Kośa* is of course much later, and not necessarily completely representative of the positions scrutinised in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Nonetheless, it constitutes the most detailed account of mainstream *Abhidharma* available in Sanskrit, and thus I feel that using the *Kośa* (albeit with some caution) is the preferable option for this thesis: especially considering that Chapter 3 looks at Nāgārjuna through Candrakīrti and through his Madhyamaka successors (Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati), for whom the *Kośa* was possibly a reference work on *Abhidharma*. Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* quotes the views of several schools of *Abhidharma*, and shows familiarity with a wide literature now unavailable in its originals, while Prajñākaramati seems more heavily dependent on the *Kośa* and later *Śāstras*.

¹²⁶ On this issue, see especially Paul Williams, 'On The Abhidharma Ontology', in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 9 (1981), 227-257.

The usage of the word *kāritra* is significant. It is here translated as ‘activity’, and Vasubandhu glosses it as ‘the operation of a person’ (*puruṣakāra*).¹²⁷ This gloss is obviously by analogy: it is what we understand as *kāritra* in the world, while in the *Abhidharma* the operation must be ascribed to *dharma*s (in this case, to the *lakṣaṇa*s). There is, therefore a *kāra*, some ‘doing’, without there being a ‘*puruṣa*’, a person. Vasubandhu indicates as much in his gloss to the word *puruṣakāra* in another section:

Something *alike* the operation of a person, is the ‘operation of a person’. As in: the ‘crow’s feet herb’ or the ‘drunken elephant man’.¹²⁸

This is better understood in the light of Yaśomitra’s sub-commentary:

When for a *dharma* there is a *karman*, an action, the latter is its ‘operation of the person’. (Objection): Indeed, as no ‘person’ prompting from inside exists, a ‘person’ is merely *dharma*s: therefore shouldn’t it become ‘the operation of *dharma*s’, rather than ‘the operation of a person’? Because of all this he says ‘something *alike* the operation of a person is “the operation of a person”’. Just like in the world for an imagined person there is ‘the operation of a person’, in the same way it is for a *dharma* as well: therefore, something *alike* the operation of a person is ‘the operation of a person’. He gives examples: ‘the crow’s feet herb’, and so forth. Some herb, in the shape of crow’s feet, is called ‘crow’s feet’. A hero who is seen to be like a drunken elephant, that man is a ‘drunken elephant’.¹²⁹

¹²⁷ Dhammajoti also translates *kāritra* as ‘activity’, although he mentions some indecision in this respect. See KL Dhammajoti, *Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma*, Sri Lanka: Center for Buddhist Studies, 2002. I was also uncertain as to the most suitable translation of this term, but the gloss as *puruṣakāra* suggests that ‘activity’ may be a plausible option.

¹²⁸ *puruṣakāra iva hi puruṣakāraḥ | tadyathā kākajaṅghā oṣadhiḥ mattahastī manuṣya iti || Abhidharmakośabhāṣya 2.56.*

¹²⁹ *yasya dharmasya yatkarma yā kriyā sā tasya puruṣakāra ity arthaḥ | nanu cāntarvyāpārapuruṣābhāve dharmamātraṁ puruṣa ity ato dharmakāra iti prāpnoti na puruṣakāraḥ evaṁ dharmasyāpīti āha puruṣakāra iva hi puruṣakāraḥ | yathā loke kalpitasya puruṣasya puruṣakāraḥ evaṁ dharmasyāpīti puruṣakāra iva puruṣakāraḥ | dṛṣṭāntaṁ kathayati kākajaṅghā oṣadhiḥ ity ādi | kākajaṅghākāra oṣadhiḥ kākajaṅghetyucyate | mattahastīva yo dṛṣṭaḥ śūro vā sa manuṣyo mattahastīti || Yaśomitra’s sub-commentary on Abhidharmakośabhāṣya 2.56.*

In brief this is a case of metaphor or secondary usage (*upacāra*), which I will discuss later in see a later in this Chapter.

Whatsoever possesses the ‘doing’ will be, etymologically at least, a *kāraka*: the *Ābhidhārmikas* avoided to speak of this as a case of agency (*karṭṛtva*), although the language of agency would lend itself to this extension towards the insentient – following Patañjali’s own hint that all *kāraṅkas* are, in fact, agents.¹³⁰ Yaśomitra remarks, though, that for the Buddhists there is no difference between the *karman* and those who perform it,¹³¹ and the section quoted above specifies that in this case *karman* is a synonym of activity (*kriyā*).

In this instance, *Vaibhāṣikas* seem to side-step Sanskrit grammatical categories, to give a more ontologically grounded depiction of an activity, which is no ‘agency’. This activity pertains only to three *lakṣaṇas*, and thus the Buddha did not mention *sthiti*.

An additional reason for not mentioning ‘abiding’ is that this characteristic is common to compounded and un-compounded *dharma*s alike: in other words, it is not helpful in identifying a *dharma* as compounded (and we are here concerned with the four *lakṣaṇas* of *compounded dharma*s). Hence, although all compounded *dharma*s are also characterised by ‘abiding’, there was no special need to mention this.

Alternatively, the compound ‘*sthity-anyathātvam*’ can be analysed as a *dvanda*, meaning ‘abiding and modification’ instead of a *tatpuruṣa* like ‘the

¹³⁰ As discussed in Chapter 1.

¹³¹ *na hi karma karmavadbhīyo ’nyad iṣyate baudhdhaiḥ* || Yaśomitra’s sub-commentary on *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* 2.56.

modification of abiding'. The joint mention of the two is explained on pedagogical grounds: 'abiding' is the locus of possible attachment, and as such is paired with what renders it unappealing – its impermanence.¹³²

Thus, conclude the *Vaibhāṣikas*, there are four characteristics of the compounded factors (*saṃskṛta-lakṣaṇāni*). These are substantially existent: they are *dravyasat*, and not only conceptual occurrences, *prajñaptisat*. In other words, they are real *dharma*s.

The last point poses a difficulty. If the four *lakṣaṇas* are also compounded factors, they should in turn be characterised by another set of four characteristics, since the characteristics determine the quality of being compounded (*saṃskṛtatva*). The four *lakṣaṇas* need to be *lakṣyas* as well: each of the primary characteristics needs to be characterised by other substantially existent birth, decay, abiding and impermanence. If this is granted, the *Vaibhāṣika* position seems open to infinite regress, since the second set of sixteen (four for each of the primary four) will have to be further qualified by another set of four characteristics for each one, and so forth, in an exponential proliferation of existent *dharma*s.

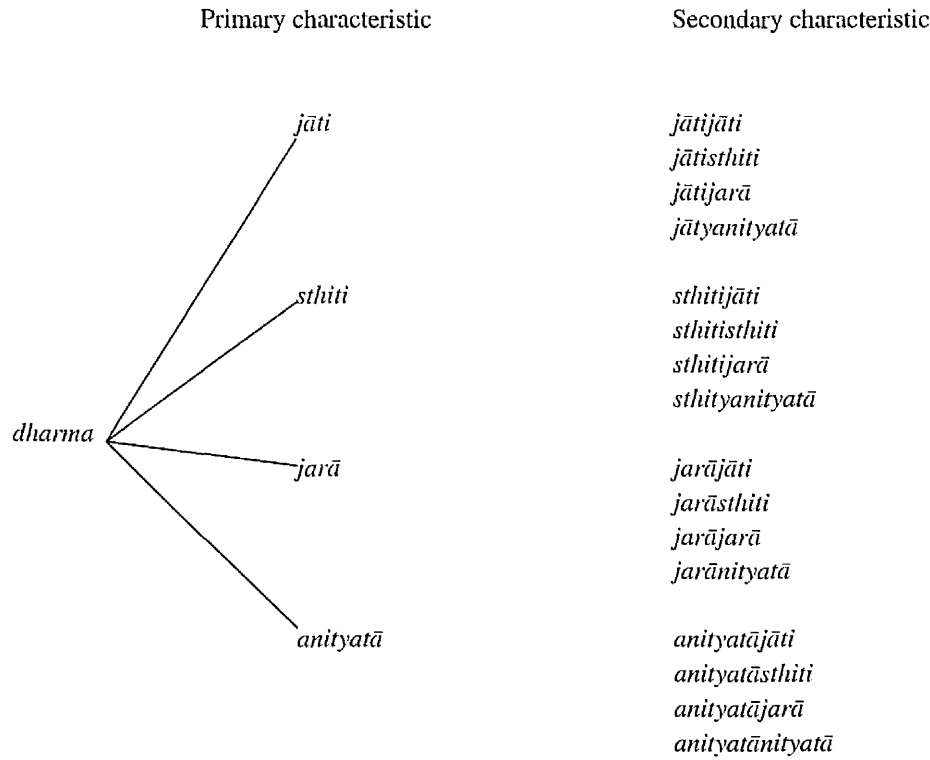
The impasse is avoided by distinguishing between the efficacy of the primary and secondary characteristics. Each of the primary characteristics gives birth to eight *dharma*s, while each of the secondary characteristics gives birth only to one *dharma*. This is no great theoretical inconsistency: since, as Vasubandhu puts it 'some hens bear many chicks, some, only few'.¹³³

¹³² *eṣā hy eṣu saṅgāspadam atāḥ śriyam ivaināṃ kālakarṇīśahitām darśayāmāsa tasyām anāsaṅgārtham iti* || *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on 2.45.

¹³³ *tadyathā kila kācīt kukkuṭī bahūny apatyāni prajāyate, kācid alpāni* || The word *kila* usually indicates that Vasubandhu does not personally accept the view he is depicting. Nonetheless, I think that rendering this explicitly while translating the root verses of the *Kośa* does not do full justice to the pun employed by Vasubandhu. *Kila* need not necessarily be taken as a pointer of

More specifically, when the primary characteristic 'birth' (*jāti*) comes about, it generates the *dharma* to which it refers; its abiding, decay and impermanence; and, lastly, birth's own birth (*jātijāti*), abiding, decay and impermanence. The same is to be applied to the other three characteristics. On the other hand, the birth of birth (*jātijāti*) only generates the primary birth – thus, it is a hen that bears only one chick. The same applies to the other three secondary characteristics, and this reciprocal relation averts an infinite regress.

For each *dharma*, we have thus the following scheme:



sarcasm, and it could be understood as mere emphasis, or even appreciation ('indeed'). Only by reading the commentary, one would understand that this 'indeed' means the opposite of its literal meaning. To disclose this even when translating the verses deprives Vasubandhu's work of its intended humour. See for example, Leo M. Pruden (tr.), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* by *Louis de La Vallée Poussin*, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, where *kila* is rendered with 'they say' (page 57; see also page 133, note 16).

2.1.2 The *lakṣaṇas* and *sahabhūhetu*

The *Vaibhāṣika* position is further clarified in a later section of the *Kośa*, where the pair of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* is explicitly taken to exemplify *sahabhūhetu*, the second in the list of ‘six causes’.¹³⁴

The *sahabhūhetu* covers instances of co-occurrence, where each element is the result of another and *viceversa*: it is a type of synchronic and reciprocal (*mithaḥ*) causation. Other examples of this causal relation are the four great elements, or mind and associated mental events – always occurring at the same time and not in succession.

Lakṣya and *lakṣaṇa* are described according to this category of reciprocal causality. Since all compounded *dharma*s are *lakṣyas* in respect to the four *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas* (as we have seen), it follows that they are always *sahabhūhetus*. But what is the status of the *anulakṣaṇas*, like *jātijāti* and so on?

For their case, and only for their case, the *Vaibhāṣika* allows an exception: each *dharma* is *sahabhūhetu* for the *anulakṣaṇas*, but they are not in turn *sahabhūhetus* for the *dharma*. In other words, the clause that this type of causal relation has to be reciprocal is removed, extending the nomenclature to a case where there is only synchronicity and one-sided causality.

We may be tempted to see a weakness in the invocation of such ad hoc extensions: arguing for the real existence of *lakṣaṇas* and *anulakṣaṇas*,

¹³⁴ ‘Things that are effects of each other are the *sahabhū* (co-occurring). Like the elements, like mind and mind-accompaniments, or characteristic and characterised.’

sahabhūr ye mithaḥ phalāḥ | bhūtavac cittacittānuvarīlakṣaṇalakṣyavat || Abhidharmakośa, 2.50bcd. The following discussion also refers to the *Bhāṣya* and the *ṭīkā*.

Vaibhāṣikas need to postulate a unique type of causation occurring nowhere else in their accepted universe. Yet, Yaśomitra remarks that:

Providing an exception shows the greatness of a *śāstra*: we see that great *śāstras*, like grammar and so on, include exceptions.¹³⁵

Incidentally, grammar (*vyākaraṇa*), is here taken as the first example of a ‘great *śāstra*’. Considering Yaśomitra’s fondness for grammatical analysis, this may come as no surprise. Apart from authorial inclination, though, the example is apt due to grammar’s paradigmatic role as a way of speaking about *lakṣaṇas* (the topic of Chapter 1). *Upasaṁkhyāna* (what I translated as ‘exception’) is after all a technical term in Pāṇini’s system, used to refer to some of the Kātyāyana’s comments: Yaśomitra seems to suggest that the *Vaibhāṣikaśāstra* is great since it uses the same devices (and terms) employed in *vyākaraṇa*. The suggestion’s weight rests on the indisputability of grammar’s greatness.

Whether the employment of *upasaṁkhyāna* constitutes a flaw or a sign of excellence, another, more fundamental problem compromises this account of *sahabhūhetu*. The *Bhāṣya* reports a relatively long discussion about this *Vaibhāṣika* category, where one of the objections is:

How can *dharma*s arisen together be in a state of cause and effect?¹³⁶

The objector is not identified (not even by Yaśomitra). However, this objection fits the *Sautrāntika* strictly diachronic understanding of causality, and is often found in *pramāṇavāda* type of texts, more in tune with the latter’s view.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ *upasaṁkhyānakaraṇaṁ ca mahāśāstratāpradarśanārtham | sopasaṁkhyānaṁ hi vyākaraṇādi mahāśāstrāṇi dṛśyate* || I rendered this passage somewhat freely, as I felt that reproducing the original syntactical structure would have been particularly cumbersome in English.

¹³⁶ *kathaṁ sahotpannānāṁ dharmāṇāṁ hetuphalabhāva iti* ||

¹³⁷ See, for example, Mokṣākaragupta’s argument in *Tarkabhāṣā, Pratyakṣapariccheda*: ‘And it does not hold good that mind and mental derivatives are illumined by another knowledge

I may anticipate that this instance provides an argument by contrast in favour of a relative theoretical closeness between *Madhyamaka* (especially Candrakīrti's) and *Vaibhāṣika*. A strictly diachronic understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* poorly squares with the *Mādhyamikas*' extended interpretation of the latter as a logical category, not temporally determined. As we shall see in the next chapter, Candrakīrti's amplifications of Nāgārjuna's treatment of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* provide for a case in point.

2.1.3 *Sautrāntika* criticism of the four *lakṣaṇas*

The *Vaibhāṣika* analysis of *lakṣaṇas* and *anulakṣaṇas* is severely criticised by the *Sautrāntikas*. Vasubandhu introduces their objections with the remark 'All this is like cutting space' (*tad etad ākāśam pāṭyate*). Similar expressions appear elsewhere in the *Kośa*, whenever the *Vaibhāṣika* 'ontological excesses' have to be curbed. Yaśomitra explains that *pāṭyate* can either mean to cut or to analyse, explicating a pun that is comprehensible only when we keep in mind a certain debate about existents, as the background.¹³⁸

The *Vaibhāṣikas* accepted space (*ākāśa*) as one of the three un-compounded *dharmas*, and defined it as absence of obstruction (*anāvṛti*).¹³⁹ *Sautrāntikas*

occurring at the same time. Because, those two are not in a state of benefiting and benefited, just like the right and left horns of a cow.'

*na tāvat samānakālabhāvinā jñānāntareṇa cittacaittaṃ prakāśyata iti ghaṭate |
upakāryopakāraśāntvābhāvāt savyetaragoviṣāṇayor iva |*

More on the issue of *sahābhūhetu* is to be found in Y. Karunadasa, 'The Theravada Version of the Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness', in *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 1, Sri Lanka: Centre for Buddhist Studies, 2003, pages 120-185. See also: K.L. Dhammajoti, 'The Sarvāstivāda Doctrine of Simultaneous Causality', in *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 1, Sri Lanka: Centre for Buddhist Studies, 2003, pages 17-54.

¹³⁸ Or, as per Collett Cox's wording, a debate about 'disputed *dharmas*'.

were quick to retort that a mere absence should not be taken as a real existent (*dravyasat*), as it is a mere conceptual occurrence (*prajñaptisat*). Therefore, just like it is impossible to literally cut space into parts, it is equally inappropriate to analyse a mere conceptual occurrence as if it was a real existent *dharma*. This applies not only to space, but also to several other *Vaibhāṣika* categories, criticised by *Sautrāntikas* as being merely concepts. The four characteristics (*lakṣaṇas*) are one such group: it is therefore hardly sensible to postulate another set of secondary characteristics to solve a theoretical problem that was never there in the beginning.

The *Sautrāntika* criticism well exemplifies certain basic differences within the two schools. *Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma* can be said to have a certain rationalist bent, in the sense that what looks no more than logically plausible is easily given existential status as *dravyasat*. In this sense, it did resemble the non-Buddhist *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika*, and Vasubandhu effectively highlights this similarity on occasions, obviously as a shortcoming.¹⁴⁰ *Sautrāntikas*, on the other hand, seemed more interested in epistemological clarity, as the later developments of this school testify for. This resulted in a more parsimonious ontology. The first reason for not accepting the four *lakṣaṇas* to be real existents

¹³⁹ 'The ones without outflows are the Truth of the Path and also the threefold un-compounded: space and the two cessations. Among these, space is absence of obstruction.'
*anāsravā mārgasatyāṃ trividhāṃ cāpy asaṃskṛtam | ākāśaṃ dvau nirodhau ca tatrākāśam
 anāvṛtiḥ || Abhidharmakośakārikā 1.5.*

¹⁴⁰ For example, in the *Bhāṣya* to 2.41a, Vasubandhu criticises the *Vaibhāṣika* conception of *sabhāgatā*, pointing to its similarity to the *Vaiśeṣika sāmānya* '[...] how is the designation of *sabhāgatā* done as non-different? In this way, they show themselves to be *Vaiśeṣikas*. The latter also uphold the following conclusion: there is indeed a category called 'generality', since the cognition of the same arises even in reference to diverse things.'
*[...] katham abhedena sabhāgatāprajñaptiḥ kriyate, vaiśeṣikāś caivaṃ dyotitā bhavanti | teṣāṃ
 api hy eṣa siddhantaḥ | sāmānyapadārtho nāmāsti yataḥ samānapratyayotpattir atulyarakāreṣv
 apīti |*

On this see also Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas. Early Buddhist Theories on Existence*, Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995, pages 107-112.

(*dravyasat*) is none other than the absence of a *pramāṇa*, a means of valid knowledge that could corroborate their existence.

This is on the face of the *Sūtra* passage just mentioned, which speaks of 'arising, decay and abiding-modification'. The *Sautrāntikas*, therefore, need to give an alternative explanation of the same passage: they claim that the *Vaibhāṣikas* took the text too literally, while the Buddha warned that one should resort to the intended meaning (*arthaś ca pratisaraṇaṁ uktam bhagavatā*).

For the *Sautrāntikas*, the first mistake on the part of their opponents is a wrong identification of the referent of the four characteristics. They should properly be taken to qualify a flow (*pravāha*) of *saṁskāras*, and not a momentary *dharma*, taken singularly. The word *saṁskṛta*, compounded, refers only to a continuum, while the single momentary *dharma* is not compounded, but compounding (*saṁskāra*), being the basic unit from which the former is constituted as a conceptual occurrence.

A continuum of instants (*kṣaṇas*) can be easily described in terms of the three *lakṣaṇas*: the beginning of the flow is its arising (*utpāda*); its cessation is the passing away (*vyaya*); the flow itself, while occurring, is the abiding (*sthiti*); and, the differences between its anterior and posterior moments is the modification of its abiding (*sthitanyathātvam*). The *lakṣaṇas* are nothing over and beyond the continuum itself: they are only conceptual occurrences (*prajñaptisat*) characterising a specific behaviour of a group of real, momentary *dharms*.

The Buddha taught in this way to highlight the fact that every continuum originates in dependence upon causes and conditions, and has no permanent

core or self.¹⁴¹ Here compounded (*saṃskṛta*) is glossed as a synonym of dependently arisen (*pratītyasamutpanna*). Yaśomitra amplifies:

‘The quality of being compounded’ and ‘the quality of being dependently arisen’ are synonyms. Compounded means made by conditions after they come together or join, dependently arisen means arisen after having met such and such condition.¹⁴²

This understanding of the etymology of *pratītyasamutpāda* is identical to the one defended by Candrakīrti in the *Prasannapadā*, as it takes *pratītya* as an absolutive, formed by *prati* with the addition of the root *ī* and the suffix *ktvā* (the one regulated by the *sūtra* on continued agency).¹⁴³ The *Sautrāntika* equation here is ‘dependently originated equals compounded’ (*pratītyasamutpanna* equals *saṃskṛta*), and is derived from a strictly temporal understanding of dependent origination as occurring between momentary *dharma*s in a flow. This restriction of dependent origination to an analysis of causation in time is, as we shall see, what Candrakīrti would specifically oppose, despite the analogous etymological understanding.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ As the *Bhāṣya* puts it: ‘What is its meaning then? The immature, blinded by ignorance, trusting in and liking the chain of *saṃskāras* as a self or something belonging to the self, become attached. In order to remove that misplaced trust, the Blessed One wished to highlight that the chain of *saṃskāras* is compounded and dependently originated, and said: ‘These are the three characteristic of the compounded for the compounded’.

*kaḥ punar asyārthaḥ | avidyāndhā hi bālāḥ saṃskāraprabandham ātmata ātmīyataś
cādhiṃmuktāḥ kṛtarucayo ’bhiṣvajante | tasya mithyādhimokṣasya vyāvarttanārthanḥ bhagavān
tasya saṃskārapravāhasya saṃskṛtatvaṃ pratītyasamutpannatvaṃ dyotayitukāma idam āha |
trīṇmāni saṃskṛtasya saṃskṛtalakṣaṇāni ||*

¹⁴² *saṃskṛtatvaṃ pratītyasamutpannatvaṃ iti paryāyav etau | sametya saṃbhūya pratyayaḥ
kṛtāḥ saṃskṛtāḥ, tāḥ tāḥ pratyayaḥ pratītya samutpannāḥ pratītyasamutpannāḥ iti ||*

¹⁴³ See 1.7, 1.7.1.

¹⁴⁴ This is the beginning of Candrakīrti’s polemic against Bhāvaviveka, occasioned by the *Prasannapadā*’s gloss on the word *pratītyasamutpāda* appearing in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 1.2.

Vasubandhu further points out that certain passages in *Vaibhāṣika* texts (like the *Jñānaprasthāna*) make sense only if we understand *lakṣaṇas* as referring to a flow.¹⁴⁵ Despite this, it is still possible to take *lakṣaṇas* to be conceptual occurrences, even if we understand them to qualify the momentary *dharma*s taken singularly:

How? For each instant, existence after not having existed is ‘arising’, non-existence after having existed is ‘passing away’, the succession of subsequent instants to their precedent ones is ‘abiding’ and their difference from them is ‘modification of its abiding’.¹⁴⁶

Once more referring to a situation through time, we find here two expressions containing *ktvā* suffixes: *abhūtvābhāvaḥ*, existence after not having existed and *bhūtvābhāḥ*, non-existence after having existed.

In the first expression, following Pāṇini, the same agent should be taken as the one who did not exist in the past and that exists later. In the second, the same is true of the one who existed and subsequently does not exist. This procedure, though, is merely analytical, as it refers an agent to an action that, being displaced in time, it could not have done (since the agent is here the momentary *dharma*, lasting only one moment). Moreover, *non-existing* is an action only in the grammatical sense, since for the *Sautrāntika*, as we have seen, existence and activity are synonyms. Therefore, the very grammar describing the first two *lakṣaṇas* implies them being mere conceptual occurrences (*prajñaptisat*).

¹⁴⁵ ‘Even what was said in the *Jñānaprasthāna*: ‘In reference to one mind, what is arising? He says: birth. What is disappearance? Death. What is the modification of abiding? Decay.’ In that context too a mind in the sense of *nikāyasabhāga* (i.e., a continuum throughout one life) makes sense’.

yad api jñānaprasthāna uktam | ekasmīnś cīte ka utpādaḥ | āha | jātīḥ | ko vyayaḥ | maraṇam | kiṁ sthityanyathātvam | jarā | iti | tatrāpi nikāyasabhāgacittān yujyate ||

¹⁴⁶ *Katham iti? pratikṣaṇam abhūtvā bhāva utpādaḥ, bhūtvā 'bhāvo vyayaḥ, pūrvasya pūrvasyottarotarakṣaṇānubandhaḥ sthitiḥ, tasyāvisadṛśatvaṁ sthityanyathātvam iti ||*

After defending this interpretation against possible objections, though, Vasubandhu goes back to assert that *lakṣaṇas* should more sensibly be understood as qualifying a flow, and not a single momentary *dharma*. He adduces a *sūtra* passage, where the word *prabandha* (linked continuity) explicitly occurs in reference to ‘abiding’, in accordance to the interpretation of the four *lakṣaṇas* initially proposed by the *Sautrāntika* (see above).

This discussion links the question of the four *lakṣaṇas* to central issues, like dependent origination and the momentary nature of all *dharma*s. The implications of the next objection to the doctrine of really existent *lakṣaṇas* are nonetheless broader, and make the few *Sautrāntika* remarks that follow particularly important for the overall understanding of how definitions, and characteristics, may work.

2.1.4 On definitions and characteristics: beyond the four *lakṣaṇas*

Vasubandhu raises a possible *Vaibhāṣika* rebuttal:

How, now, can the very same *dharma* be something to be characterised and its own characteristic?¹⁴⁷

The *Sautrāntikas*’ reply appeals to three cases, where the *lakṣaṇa* is shown to be the same as the *lakṣya* (in other words, only an analytic concept). The ‘marks of the Great Man’ (*mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇāni*) are not to be found anywhere beyond the group of *dharma*s called ‘Great Man’. The defining traits that make up for ‘cow-ness’ (*gotvalakṣaṇāni*), namely, the ‘dewlap, tail, hump, hoofs and horns’, are nothing but the cow. And, the *lakṣaṇas* of earth and the other elements, like hardness and so on, are no other than the elements themselves. As Yaśomitra puts it:

¹⁴⁷ *Katham idānūh sa eva dharmo lakṣyaḥ tasyaiva ca lakṣaṇaṁ yokṣyate ||*

that very element of earth, characterised as hard, is called hard-characteristic. In the very same way, the compounded, characterised as existing after having not existed, and not existing after having existed, is called compounded-characteristic, explaining the word as 'it is characterised, thus it is called characteristic'. And one is not different from the other.¹⁴⁸

This understanding of *lakṣaṇa* takes it as an object (*karman*). The usual understanding of *lakṣaṇa* is as an instrument, something through which something else is marked or characterised (*lakṣyate anena iti lakṣaṇam*). Identifying *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* will be particularly important for later *Pramāṇavāda* philosophers, like Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, for their comprehensive grouping of epistemological objects into *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa*. Candrakīrti's discussion and critique of this move acknowledges that *lakṣaṇa* can be taken in the sense we just found, as an object: it is also clear that this is not the manner he employs the term, as the next chapter will show.

Besides the overall implication of the *Sautrāntika* reply for their understanding of *lakṣaṇa*, the three examples adduced should be marked for their occurrence in different contexts, which would not have passed unobserved to Vasubandhu's contemporary readers.

The *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇas* are exceptional marks on the body of a Buddha. They are explained in the *Sūtras* as indications of past merit.¹⁴⁹ Each of the marks,

¹⁴⁸ *sa eva pṛthivīdhātuh kaṭhīno lakṣyamāṇaḥ kaṭhīnalakṣaṇa ucyate | etad eva saṃskṛtam abhūtvābhavad bhūtvābhavaḥ lakṣyamāṇaḥ saṃskṛtalakṣaṇam ucyate, lakṣyate iti lakṣaṇam iti kṛtvā | na ca tat tasmād anyat ||*

¹⁴⁹ See for example the *Lakkhana Suttanta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, trans. as 'The Marks of the Superman' in T.W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000, Part 3, pp. 137–167. See also the *Arthaviniścayasūtra*, pages 55–62 and the same, with the *Nibandhana*, pages 283–307.

like the long ear lobes or the forty teeth, is the direct result of virtues practiced for a long time in the Buddha's previous lives. They are also one of the central subject matters of an important *Mahāyāna Sūtra*, the *Vajracchedikā*, where it is clearly stated that the Buddha should not be understood (as a Buddha) by the *lakṣaṇas*. This is because, otherwise, any universal monarch could be the Buddha.¹⁵⁰ In fact, the marks of the Great Man are common to Buddhas and Universal monarchs. The further implication may in effect be a devaluation of *lakṣaṇas*, akin to what we find in the Heart *Sūtra*, where *dharma*s are empty and thus 'without characteristics'.¹⁵¹

The *Sautrāntikas* interpretation of *lakṣaṇa* as no different from the really existent momentary *dharma*s they characterise can be taken as a response to this trend: and the *Yogācāra* handling of three *lakṣaṇa* is explicitly pitched as a

¹⁵⁰ The *Vajracchedikā* gives both a general and a specific reason for not seeing the Buddha 'through characteristics'. The general reason is that characteristics are, in fact, non-characteristics; the specific reason is that these particular characteristics are common to Buddhas and Universal Monarchs. See *Vajracchedikā*: 5. *tat kiṃ manyase subhūte lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | subhūtir āha | no hīdaṃ bhagavan | na lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | tat kasya hetoḥ | yā sā bhagavan lakṣaṇasampat tathāgatena bhāṣitā saivālakṣaṇasampat | evaṃ ukte bhagavān āyusmantāṃ subhūtim etad avocat | yāvat subhūte lakṣaṇasampat tāvaṃ mṛṣā yāvad alakṣaṇasampat tāvaṃ na mṛṣeti hi lakṣaṇālakṣaṇatas tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ || 13. bhagavān āha | tat kiṃ manyase subhūte dvātriṃśan mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇais tathāgato 'rhan samyaksambuddho draṣṭavyaḥ | subhūtir āha | no hīdaṃ bhagavan | dvātriṃśan mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇais tathāgato 'rhan samyaksambuddho draṣṭavyaḥ | tat kasya hetoḥ | yāni hi tāni bhagavan dvātriṃśan mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇāni tathāgaena bhāṣitāni alakṣaṇāni tāni bhagavaṃs tathāgatena bhāṣitāni | tenocyante dvātriṃśan mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇānī || 20. bhagavān āha | tat kiṃ manyase subhūte lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | subhūtir āha | no hīdaṃ bhagavan | na lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | tat kasya hetoḥ | yaīṣā bhagavan lakṣaṇasampat tathāgatena bhāṣitā alakṣaṇasampad eṣā tathāgatena bhāṣitā | tenocyate lakṣaṇasampad iti || 26. tat kiṃ manyase subhūte lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | subhūtir āha | no hīdaṃ bhagavan | yathāhaṃ bhagavato bhāṣitasyārtham ājānāmi na lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | bhagavān āha | sādhu sādhu subhūte evaṃ etat subhūte evaṃ etad yathā vadasi | na lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | tat kasya hetoḥ | sa cet punaḥ subhūte lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyo 'bhaviṣyat rājāpi cakravartī tathāgato 'bhaviṣyat | tasmān na lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ | āyusmān subhūtir bhagavantam etad avocat yathāhaṃ bhagavato bhāṣitasyārtham ājānāmi na lakṣaṇasampadā tathāgato draṣṭavyaḥ ||*

¹⁵¹ *evaṃ sārīputra sarvadharmāḥ sūnyatālakṣaṇā anutpannā aniruddhā amalāvimālā anūnā asaṃpūrṇāḥ || Hṛdayasūtram*, long version (almost the same in the *saṃkṣiptamūrtkā* version).

corrective, employing the same grammatical analysis of the word. This may help explain Candrakīrti's unsympathetic glance at the alterative exegesis, and his preference for a non-identification between *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*. If they are accepted to be the same, the type of relational analysis towards emptiness favoured by Candrakīrti, cannot be employed.

The next example of cow-ness is at least as old as Patañjali. In the *Mahābhāṣya*, it is asked whether, in fact, the 'dewlap, tail, hump, hoofs and horns' are to be identified with the word 'cow'.¹⁵² This is the first given alternative in a series of possible explanations of what 'word' may mean: commentators clarify that this section is trying to introduce a distinction between word and referent.¹⁵³ This distinction is not clearly understood in daily life, but is essential to grammar. That which has dewlap and so on is not the word 'cow', but its referent, the cow itself as a thing (*dravya*).

A sub-variety of this example also became popular to explain in general terms how a proper definition works. We find in *Nyāya* manuals that a *lakṣaṇa* needs to avoid three defects in order to be called so: non-pervasion, over-pervasion and implausibility. This is explained through a cow being definable as something with a dewlap, possessed by all cows and by cows only.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² *gaur ity atra kaḥ śabdaḥ | 5. kiṃ yat tat sāsṇālāṅgūlakakudakhuraviṣāṇy artharūpaṃ sa śabdaḥ || Paspasāhnikam, 4.*

¹⁵³ 'This is a cow, this is white': seeing that in the world there is a usage that does not distinguish between word and referent, in order to ascertain the nature of words, he asks 'then' and so on.'

ayaṃ gauḥ ayaṃ śuklaḥ iti śabdārthayor abhedena loke vyavahāradarśanāc chabdasvarūpanīrdhāraṇāya prcchati atheti || Pradīpa on the same section.

¹⁵⁴ See for example, *Tarkasaṃgrahadīpikā* on *Tarkasaṃgraha* 1.3: *lakṣyaikadeśāvṛttitvam avyāptiḥ | yathā goḥ kapilatvam | alakṣye lakṣaṇasya vartanam ativyāptiḥ | yathā goḥ śṛṅgitvam | lakṣyamātrāvṛttitvam asaṃbhavaḥ | yathā gor ekaśaphavattvam | etad*

This second instance, therefore, brings in a common discourse on *lakṣaṇas*: the *Sautrāntikas* wish to show that their understanding of a characteristic is in line with a more widely employed technical usage, going beyond Buddhist *Abhidharma*.

Subsequently, the *lakṣaṇa* of ‘earth’ is quoted. Yaśomitra draws out the sense of this quotation very well:

This example is established for both of us, being established in the Discourses. The earth element is called ‘hard-characteristic’, and it is not that hardness is anything other than the earth element.¹⁵⁵

Here the context is restricted to a shared Buddhist tenet, reinterpreted to fit the *Sautrāntika*’s understanding of *lakṣaṇa* as indicating an object. If in cases like the hardness of earth, the hardness is no other than earth, the expression *kāṭhinalakṣaṇaḥ* should be taken as a *tatpuruṣa* and not as a *bahuvrīhi*: it is not that the earth has the characteristic of hardness, *it is* the characteristic of hardness. In this case, the instrumental interpretation of *lakṣaṇa* is weaker, even in order to explain a commonly accepted definition.

All three *lakṣaṇas* can be employed by Buddhist authors, yet they do belong to clearly distinct levels of discourse. The *mahāpuruṣalakṣaṇas* are part of worldly, non-technical usages, since the idea that some individuals may be marked as exceptional through recognisable physical characteristics does not necessarily belong to a theorised reflection on the nature of definitions: it belongs to ordinary speech. The same cannot be said of the attempt to circumscribe precise marks to distinguish cows from non-cows, a technical operation which is

dūṣaṇatrayarahitadharma lakṣaṇam || The ‘dewlap’ appears in the translation and, strangely enough, not in the text of the *Dīpikā*: it is nonetheless a sort of stock-example.

¹⁵⁵ *ubhayasiddho ’yaṁ dṛṣṭāntaḥ, pravacanasiddhatvāt | kāṭhinalakṣaṇo hi pṛthivīdhātur ucyate, na ca pṛthivīdhātor anyat kāṭhīnyam* ||

already within the realm of *sāstric* debate. Lastly, the *lakṣaṇas* of *Abhidharma* constitute a privileged set, since they are able to explicate the ultimate referents of any other level of speech, in order to neutralise all the terms that may suggest the permanence of a substantial core. The *Sautrāntikas* point out that, when in all these three types of *lakṣaṇas* the characteristic is nothing other than the characterised, it is plain idiosyncrasy to treat the four *lakṣaṇas* as if utterly different from all other cases.

One more example is given, which matches an ordinary perceptual act with its Abhidharmic analysis. We notice the presence of smoke, even from afar, from an upward movement: the movement, though, is no other than the smoke. What is noticed (smoke) and that through which we notice it (the movement) are identical: *lakṣaṇa* is both an instrumental and objective term. Yaśomitra expands the rationale behind this identification:

For the *Vaibhāṣika*, who upholds momentariness, the upward movement of smoke is not different from the latter. That itself, arising in sequence in discrete higher locations, gets to the state of upward movement. That upward movement is marked (*lakṣyate*) as if separate from it, but no ‘quality of upward movement’ is accepted as distinct from the smoke.¹⁵⁶

Here the analogy is between the four *lakṣaṇas* and the movement of smoke. ‘The quality of being compounded’ (*saṃskṛtatva*) is only a name for certain regular behaviours of momentary *dharma*s, namely their arising, similarity, dissimilarity and disappearance, comprising the four *lakṣaṇas*. ‘The quality of upper movement’ (*ūrdhvagamanatva*) is no other than a specific behaviour of momentary *dharma*s of smoke, arising and passing away in increasingly higher locations. The specific spatial configuration of the sequence of similar smoke-instants gives the illusion of a continuous agent performing a certain action,

¹⁵⁶ *kṣaṇikavādinō vaibhāṣikasya dhūmasyordhvagamanāṃ nānyad asti | sa evordhvadeśāntareṣu nīrantaram utpadyamānāṃ ūrdhvagamanāvasthāṃ labhate | tad ūrdhvagamanāṃ tato bhinnāṃ iva lakṣyate na ca dhūmasyordhvagamanatvam anyad iṣyate ||*

namely, moving upward. In fact, here we have an activity (*kāritra*), which does not involve any continuous agent beyond its evanescent manifestations: this 'refutation of motion' is very much akin to the one in the commentary to *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*, as we shall see in Chapter 5.

Vasubandhu offers other arguments to show that the *Vaibhāṣikas*' understanding of *lakṣaṇas* is unconvincing and fraught with logical flaws. In particular, the possibility of linking supra-temporal *lakṣaṇas* to their momentary manifestations in the present is brought into question. Resorting to the medium of *kāritra* complicates the issue, and some of the criticism to this scheme will be taken into consideration in Chapter 5, since the link to *kāritra* is also proposed and rejected in Vasubandhu's commentary to the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*. This second similarity between the two commentaries (possibly by the same author) suggests a certain relation between them: perhaps the latter should be read as encased in the ongoing debate delineated in the *Bhāṣya*.

This discussion suggests at least three important points concerning the four *lakṣaṇas*:

- i. they were understood differently in *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika*;
- ii. they were closely linked to their doctrine of momentariness, which was also different in the two systems;
- iii. their interpretation of the four *lakṣaṇas* had repercussions on their overall understanding of what a *lakṣaṇa* is, with the *Sautrāntikas* favouring a sequential understanding of dependent arising where *lakṣaṇas* are only analytical terms for its behaviour.

All three points are relevant for a proper analysis of later debates on conventions, and bear upon the sections of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā* that will

be treated in the next Chapter. Point (iii) will provide an especially useful background, since the status of *lakṣaṇas* is the main focus of Candrakīrti's argument.

2.2 The seer and the knower: identifying the synchronic agent

The *Vaibhāṣikas* analyse causation in terms of supra-temporal *dharmas*, instantiated into the present as activities by the projecting force of their *lakṣaṇas*. *Sautrāntikas* accept momentary and causally related *dharmas*, with no existence in the future or past. A noticeable trait of both accounts is that, not only they are utterly impersonal, but they also eschew any usage of the idea of 'agent', however loosely understood.

Such method may appear to be in tune with the very purpose of *Abhidharma*. The latter proposes itself as a 'transparent' language to speak the workings of complex impersonal processes. Conventional linguistic usages burden reality with fictitious identities, 'agent' being one such imperfect habit of speech. Indeed, as we shall see, this seems to be the *Sautrāntika* (and perhaps *Yogācāra*) stand.

But is an agent necessarily a person? We have seen that when grammarians speak of a *karṭṛ*, there is no restriction implying that it should be sentient. Moreover, the primary sense of 'agent' might be understood as a capacity (*śakti*), either a syntactical capacity or, as a counterpart 'in the world', the power to contribute towards the accomplishment of the main action. In either case, we are certainly not concerned with a person, or a 'self' for that matter. This suggests that the impersonal language of momentary *dharmas* need not do away with the analytical category of 'agent'.

The *Abhidharmakośa* testifies for that: the commentary and sub-commentary to 1.42 record a lengthy discussion, trying to find a proper place for the *kartṛ*, when a cognitive act (like ‘seeing’ or ‘knowing’) is analysed. The focus here is on synchronic agency, leaving out the problem of continued agency through time (as in the case of statements regarding rebirth, or acting after an intention, etc.). In some sense, this type of identification is more basic, while any diachronic scheme must be derived from this initial assessment of the nature of each act, irrespective of their succession through time.

The passage I have chosen is interesting for a number of reasons. First of all, Vasubandhu offers a gamut of rebuttals to the position that ‘the eye sees’, some of which resemble the *Yogācāra* position as criticised by Candrakīrti, and which are in fact identified as such by Yaśomitra. This short discussion, thus, throws light upon Candrakīrti’s relation to *Abhidharma* - since the *Yogācāra* position he criticises is here articulated stressing the precise features he is going to criticise, such as the identification of the action with the agent.

Instead of offering a translation of the verse, commentary and sub-commentary, I will give a summary taking from the three, and highlighting whatever relevant.

2.2.1 *Cakṣuḥ paśyati rūpāṇi*

The eye sees forms: this is the basic statement of verse 42. By mere force of syntax, the eye (meaning, the faculty of vision, the visual organ) is the agent (*kartṛ*) or, more specifically, the seer. Should this syntactical suggestion be taken literally?

Advaita thinkers would answer in the negative, and their preferred solution offers a useful contrast. If we take Śāṅkara’s ‘Discrimination between the Seer

and the Seen', the question posed is in effect identical: who is it that sees, where is the agent of a cognitive act? Through a graded process of elimination, Śaṅkara concludes that 'the Seer is *Brahman*', while the seen, the object, is false. Thus, the proper referent of our syntax of agency is always *Brahman*, cognition itself, while we superimpose illusory limitations in terms of objects and persons. *Advaita* is an exercise in clarifying the proper referents of personal and non-personal pronouns: when properly understood, some terms refer to the ultimately existent.¹⁵⁷

This manner of disclosing the 'proper referent' employs the categories of grammar to assert that, in fact, speaking of an agent points to an ultimate *Brahman*, or Self, which is the very possibility of any agency – it is agency itself (at least as *tatasthalakṣaṇa*).¹⁵⁸ In one sense, this account is not particularly in tune with a 'softer' understanding of Pāṇini's categories; their structure mirrors *Advaita* ontology well, and there is no need to dilute the semantic power of terms like *karṭṛ*.¹⁵⁹ (Bhāvya pointed out this much: *Advaitins* take the *upacāra* of *karṭṛ* as a literal expression).

The more technically nuanced depiction of an agent found in grammatical commentaries and sub-commentaries, on the other hand, gives room for

¹⁵⁷ The very beginning of Śaṅkara's *Bhāṣya* opens with two personal pronouns ('you' and 'I') and explains ignorance in terms of a confusion in understanding their referents. Śaṅkara is also explicit in asserting that the ātman is not altogether beyond speech referent (*na tāvad ayam ekāntenāviśayaḥ*), because it is the 'object of the understanding of 'I'' (*asmatpratyayaviśyatvāt*), 'not removed' (*aparokṣatvāt*) and also 'establish for each person' (*pratyagātmāprasiddheḥ*). The contrast with the Buddhist position is quite significant: for Śaṅkara 'everyone accepts the existence of the Self, as 'it is not that I do not exist'' (*sarvo hy ātmāstivān pratyeti na nāhamasmī*).

¹⁵⁸ For the difference between *svarūpalakṣaṇa* and *tatasthalakṣaṇa* see, for example, *Vedāntaparibhāṣā*, 8.4 and following sections.

¹⁵⁹ If I understand it correctly, Gerow's argument agrees with these considerations. See E. Gerow, 'What is karma (kim karmeti)? An exercise in Philosophical Semantics', in *Indologica Taurinensia*, Volume X, 1982, pages 87-116.

alternative ontology. Grammarians gifted the ‘agent’ with a shifting and elastic identity, which could well find a place in the Buddhist world of evanescent existents. Thus, it may really be a momentary *dharma*, the atom-instant of the faculty of vision, to be the one who sees: the agent.¹⁶⁰

Other *dharmanas* may be candidates for the same role. Vision happens only when the eye is in conjunction with the consciousness of the same type (the visual consciousness). Without the consciousness, the eye does not see. One could therefore assume that, in fact, consciousness is the primary basis of perceptual acts (a move not too dissimilar from Śāṅkara’s own).

Nevertheless, consciousness does not have a physical presence (it is *amūrta*) that would make it liable to obstruction. If consciousness is the one who sees, we should be able to perceive anything anytime, even when something, like a wall, is in between. This disproves a position that Yaśomitra identifies as *Vijñānavāda*, and brings the discussion back to the initial thesis: ‘The eye, and not the consciousness, sees’.¹⁶¹ We can take this as the first identification of the agent, the *kartṛ* of the act of seeing.

The conclusion could occasion a further qualm. The *Vaibhāṣikas* adopted a line of argument resting on the assumption that walls or other physical objects may not obstruct consciousness. In that case, even if the eye is the one who sees, why would consciousness not arise in respect to objects behind walls, and so on?

¹⁶⁰ On the issue of the compatibility of grammarians’ depictions of agency with the Buddhist, see Chapter 1, and also Gerow, *ibidem*.

¹⁶¹ *cakṣuḥ paśyati na vijñānam* || For further references to this discussion, and for a similar account of perception taken from the *Vibhāṣā*, see Leo M. Pruden (tr.), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* by Louis de La Vallée Poussin, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1988, page 147, note 173.

Vasubandhu's answer is that an instance of visual consciousness and a moment of the eye-organ operate in reference to the same object. The visual consciousness will only arise if its substratum – the faculty of vision – will be in contact with a visible object, not otherwise. The *Vijñānavāda* position, on the other hand, fails to explain why we do not see objects behind a wall.

Yaśomitra identifies what follows as a further objection from the *Vijñānavāda* side: how is it that the faculty of vision (*cakṣuḥ*) behaves just like the tactile faculty (*kāya-indriya*), being unable to sense what is enclosed? The *Vaibhāṣikas*' reply is that it is because the enclosing matter creates obstruction. Yet, this is not satisfactory, since a transparent enclosure creates no obstacle to vision, which suggests a difference between the sense of tact and sight.

Vasubandhu's solution to this problem rests on a specific theory of perception, that Yaśomitra explains with some detail.

For the occurrence of a visual perception, three conditions are necessary (as specified in the *ṭīkā*):

the visual organ should be intact;¹⁶²

the object should be reached by light;¹⁶³

a mental act should pose its attention to that.¹⁶⁴

The problem with cases like the intervening presence of walls and so on, is not their being obstructive to the eye-sense (the *Vaibhāṣikas*' solution), but obstructive-ness to light, i.e. opacity.

¹⁶² *cakṣurindriyam anupahataṁ bhavati ||*

¹⁶³ *viṣaya ābhāsagato bhavati||*

¹⁶⁴ *tajjaś ca manasikāraḥ pratyupasthito bhavati||*

This section goes back to the position that, in fact, it is consciousness that sees: when the appropriate conditions come together, visual consciousness will arise. If we follow Yaśomitra's identification, this should be the *Vijñānavāda* position. Vasubandhu's critiques of *Vaibhāṣika* stances are usually from the *Sautrāntika* perspective, but the last portion of the discussion depicts the Sautrāntikas as discarding the very rationale that prompted it. This might explain why Yaśomitra does not identify these objections as *Sautrāntika*. The term *Vijñānavādin*, though, may have been here employed in a restricted sense of someone who advocates (*vādin*) consciousness (*vijñāna*) as the proper agent of perceptual act, which may not necessarily coincide with a *Yogācāra* philosopher.

In the *Sūtras* we find the statement 'having seen forms with the eye' (*caṅṣuṣā rūpāṇi dṛṣṭvā*). This seems to contradict the conclusion so far reached - that it is in fact visual consciousness that sees, since, as Yaśomitra specifies, such sentence would have to be amplified as 'a person sees with the eye', (*pudgalaś caṅṣuṣā paśyati*). The latter statement makes sense only if we take it that it is the eye that sees (*yasmāc caṅṣuḥ paśyati*), and not the consciousness.

Here the reply is twofold. The first possible explanation is that 'with the eye' means here 'with the support of the eye' (*tenāśrayeṇa*). The sentence should then be explained to mean 'having seen by consciousness with the support of the eye' (*caṅṣuṣā āśrayeṇa vijñānena dṛṣṭvā*). There are other usages to justify this interpretation: 'having cognised *dharma*s with the mind' (*manasā dharmān vijñāya*) cannot be taken literally, since, as Yaśomitra puts it, in the present it is the consciousness, and not the mind, to perform an activity (*kāritraṃ karoti*). Since mind is already past in the moment of cognition of *dharma*s, the latter must be a function of mental-consciousness (*manovijñāna*) and not of mind itself (*manas*). If we can ascribe agency to consciousness even in the latter usage, even in the first the agent cannot really be the visual organ.

The second reply is that the work (*karman*) of that which is supported is ascribed to the support, by approximation (*upacaryate*). Here, what is supported means the visual consciousness, which is the real agent. The support is the eye. In reference to the fact that consciousness is seeing (*viññāne paśyati sati*) there is the approximated statement that 'the eye sees' (*cakṣuḥ paśyatīty upacāraḥ*). In sentences like 'the seats cry', we cannot accept the literal meaning, since seats are not sentient. What the sentence actually means is that the men, staying in the seats, cry. There are analogous sentences in the Canon. For example, the *Sūtras* say 'the forms to be cognised with the eye are beautiful' (*cakṣurvijñeyāni rūpāṇi kāntāni*), while we (*Vaibhāṣikas*) know that it is consciousness, and not the eye, that cognises (*viññānaṃ vijānāti*). In this case too, it is consciousness (not the eye) that sees: a literal reading of some passages might mislead.

There are statements in the *Sūtras* that describe the eye-organ as a 'door' (*dvāram*) for seeing (*darśanam*). This entails that it is not the eye itself that sees, but that the eye is a cause or support (*hetuḥ* or *āśrayaḥ*) for the act of seeing, whose proper agent is in fact consciousness. If it should be that the eye itself sees, Vasubandhu explains, the meaning of such *Sūtras* would be something like 'seeing is (a door) for seeing forms' (*darśanaṃ rūpāṇāṃ darśanāya*), which makes no sense. Notice that the last point entails that Vasubandhu is inclined to identify the agent (the eye) and the action of seeing.

The most important section, from the point of view of the discussion about agency, is the next. The question is now posed: if consciousness sees, who is it that cognises?¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ *yadi viññānaṃ paśyati ko vijānāti?* || *Bhāṣyam*.

The answer is that there is no difference between the consciousness of a form, and the seeing of a form. Since the initial question was about the consciousness, which sees, this amounts to identifying the agent and the action (what Candrakīrti most abhors). The example adduced can be taken to corroborate this. Discriminative knowledge can be said either to see, or to know in detail.¹⁶⁶ If we remember that discriminative knowledge, or wisdom, is at times equated with *vipaśyanā*, it is not out of place to gloss this as suggesting that the seeing is in fact the knowledge or wisdom. And this is precisely how Yaśomitra takes this whole passage; firstly, he openly equates consciousness and seeing.¹⁶⁷ Secondly, he expounds upon the example of wisdom (*prajñā*), telling us that both the *Kośa* itself, as well as the *sūtras*, identify it as seeing. Not all consciousness, though, sees. Thus, the agent of a visual cognition is a visual consciousness, and not the eye. This concludes the first extended criticism of the *Kāśmīra Vaibhāṣika* thesis, as stated in *kārikā* 1.42.

2.2.2 *Kartṛ* and *kriyā* as analytical categories

The next possible objection to the position that 'the eye sees form', is that it appears to entail an identification of agent and action:

If it is the case that 'the eye sees'; then what is the separate action of seeing, belonging to the eye as the agent?¹⁶⁸

Vasubandhu replies that this is not a fit objection, since, in the case of consciousness, it can be accepted that consciousness cognises, and there is no difference here between agent and action. The same is to be applied to the

¹⁶⁶ *tadyathā kadācit prajñā paśyaty apy ucyate prajñānīty api* ||

¹⁶⁷ *anenopanyāsenā darśanavijñānāyor anārtthāntarabhāva iti darśayati* || *Ṭīkā*.

¹⁶⁸ *yadi cakṣuḥ paśyati kartṛbhūtasya cakṣuṣaḥ kā'nyā dṛśīkriyā* ||

statement that 'the eye sees'. Some of Yaśomitra's remarks are worth reproducing in full:

'If consciousness cognises', one should tell what is the other action of consciousness separate from consciousness as an agent - in this way, one incurs an equal fault. 'And there, there is no difference of agent and action' (means): Between the agent consciousness and the action, having the characteristic of consciousness, there is no difference, no otherness. Yet there is the naming of a link between agent and action, as in 'consciousness cognises'. Similarly here also it could be: 'the eye sees'. Thus, this is not to be faulted.¹⁶⁹

This position is particularly relevant, since it offers the possibility to identify agent and action even from a non-*Vijñānāvāda* perspective. This possibility was already adumbrated in the preceding section, when Yaśomitra had quoted from the *Kośa*, and from a *sūtra*, to show how *prajñā* (wisdom) is seeing (*darśana*), but in that case the identification of agent and action is not explicit. Here, though, we find a rather unambiguous statement of the same.

An analogous identification is to be found in the next opinion reported:

Others say: the eye-consciousness is the seeing, and because it is its support one says that 'the eye sees'. Like when, because it is the support of sound, one says 'the bell sounds'.¹⁷⁰

These and the immediately preceding 'others' cannot be *Sautrāntikas*, since, as I anticipated, the latter's position will be explicated almost at the end. Neither can they be *Vijñānavādin*, if the term is taken in its usual connotation of a specific philosophical stream – otherwise, the term 'others' would make little sense.

¹⁶⁹ *yadi vijñānaṃ vijānāti | kartṛbhūtasya vijñānasya kānyā vijñānakriyeti vaktavyam iti tulyaṃ codyam āpadyate | na ca tatra kartṛkriyābhedaḥ | na kartṛvijñānasya kriyāyāś ca vijñānalakṣaṇāyā bhedo 'nyatvam iti | bhavati ca kartṛkriyāsambandhavyapadeśaḥ vijñānaṃ vijānātīti tadvad ihāpi bhavet cakṣuḥ paśyatīty acodyam etat |*

¹⁷⁰ *apare punar bruvate 'cakṣurvijñānaṃ darśanam, tasyāśrayabhāvāt 'cakṣuḥ paśyati' ity ucyate | yathā nādasyāśrayabhāvāt 'ghaṇṭā nādati' ity ucyate iti ||*

Two facts suggest that latter two (and possibly even the first) opponents are *Vaibhāṣika* philosophers other than the *Kāśmīra*. First, the disputants appeal to the authority of the *Vibhāṣā*, which would have force only for those who accept it: this suggests that the debate is internal to *Vaibhāṣika* itself. Moreover, Vasubandhu concludes the debate by restating what he identifies as *Kāśmīra Vaibhāṣika*, not just *Vaibhāṣika*. He does not always employ this specification, when the objectors are all outside the *Vaibhāṣika* fold. Here though, the explicit mention of *Kāśmīra* may be necessitated by the fact that the objectors are themselves *Vaibhāṣika* subgroups.

The *Sautrāntikas* enter the discussion by declaring it senseless: ‘What is this, can the sky be eaten?’ (*kim idam ākāśaṃ khādyate*). Perception should be understood in terms of dependent arising, which precludes the idea of a ‘real’ agent:

Visual consciousness arises in dependence upon the eye and forms. In this case, who sees, or who is seen? Since this is non-operative (*nirvyāpāra*), mere *dharmas*, and mere cause-and-effect. On these, approximations (*upacārāḥ*) are forcefully made: the eye sees, consciousness cognises. But one should not become attached to the latter. Since, the Blessed One said: ‘One should not be attached to popular explanation, one should not run after the notions of common people’.¹⁷¹

Yaśomitra’s remarks on this section bear upon the issue of how philosophical language should relate to common usages – at least from a *Sautrāntika* stance. First, Yaśomitra places the problem within the grammatical analysis and understanding of agency:

Non-operative means inactive (*nirīḥa*): by this he negates an action existing apart from the agent. ‘Mere *dharmas*’ is the negation of an

¹⁷¹ *atra sautrāntikā āluḥ | kim idam ākāśaṃ khādyate | cakṣur hi pratītya rūpāṇi cotpadyate cakṣurvijñānam | tatra kaḥ paśyati ko vā dṛśyate | nirvyāpāraṃ hīdaṃ dharmamātraṃ hetuphalamātraṃ ca | tatra cchandata upacārāḥ kriyante cakṣuḥ paśyati vijñānaṃ vijñānātīti nātrābhiveṣṭavyam | uktam hi bhagavatā janapadaniruktiṃ nābhiniṣeṭa saṃjñāṃ ca lokasya nābhidhāved iti ||*

independent agent (*svatantrasya kartuḥ*). ‘And mere cause-and-effect’ shows that efficacy (*kāryakāraṇa*) of cause and effect is meaningful, even if an agent is not there.¹⁷²

The negation of an independent agent is the negation of Pāṇini’s definition of agency. By context, it follows that grammatical analysis is here identified with popular explanation. What follows explicates the same:

‘On this, approximations are forcefully made’: if the thing is a part of conventions (*vyavahāra*), then, in this world (*iha*) for the purpose of establishing a referent for conventions, having construed even the non-existent as existent, the determination (*vyavasthāna*) of agent, action and so on is made, such as ‘the eye sees’, ‘consciousness cognises’ and so on. ‘But one should not become attached to the latter’: an existent thing is other than something, which is about to exist, etc. ‘One should not be attached to popular explanation’: that saying which is fixed and ascertained among the people is ‘popular explanation’ and one should not be attached to that. Why? Thinking ‘here there is this explanation’ one should not think that all explanations are meaningful. ‘One should not run after (*abhidhāvet*) the notions of common people’. One should not superimpose such notions of common people as ‘self’, ‘living being’ and so on. The sense is that one should not accept that ‘there is a self, distinct from the body and the rest’, since it is the superimposition of something non-existent. Or: ‘One should not *abhidhāvet* the notions of common people’ means that one should not trespass them. The sense is that, one should not imagine that, since the referent is not there, even the notion does not exist. ‘Running beyond’ or ‘trespass’ have the same meaning.¹⁷³

¹⁷² *nirvyāpāram iti nirṭham | anena hi kartur arthāntarabhūtān kṛyān pratiṣedhati | dharmamātram iti svatantrasya kartuḥ pratiṣedhaṁ karoti | hetuphalamātram ceti | asaty api kartari hetuphalayoḥ kāryakāraṇam arthatvaṁ darśayati ||*

¹⁷³ *tatra cchandata upacārāḥ kriyante | yadi vastu vyavahārāṅgam | teneha vyavahārthasānisiddhyartham asad api sadrūpeṇa parikalpya kartṛkriyādivyavasthānān kriyate cakṣuḥ paśyati vijñānān vijñātīty evaṁ ādi | nātrābhiniṣṭavyam | bhāvo bhavitrapekṣo 'nya ity ādi | janapadaniruktiṁ nābhiniṣṭeti | janapadas tatra nīyatā niścītā cōktir janapadaniruktiḥ tān nābhiniṣṭeta | kasmāt | atreyān niruktir iti na vā sarvām evārthavatūn niruktiṁ kalpayet | sañjñān ca lokasya nābhidhāved iti | ātmeḥ jīvaḥ ity evaṁ ādikān sañjñā(n) lokasya nādhyaṛopayet | abhūtasamāropeṇa asty ātmā śarīrādivyatirikta iti nātva gacchet | atha vā sañjñān ca lokasya nābhidhāven nātisaret | arthābhāvāt sañjñāpi nāstīti na kalpayet ity arthaḥ | atisaraṇam atikramaṇam ity eko'rthaḥ || See also Leo M. Pruden (tr.), *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* by Louis de La Vallée Poussin, Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press,*

The examples given suggest that Yaśomitra understands the conventionally designated 'agent' as being none other than the 'self' or 'living being' spoken of in common usages. Seen in this light, the *Sautrāntika* position on this grammatical category seems to take it in a rather rigid way, precluding the possibility of identifying the agent with a momentary *dharma*, in contrast to the *Vaibhāṣikas*' understanding of the same. The status of notions like 'self' or 'living being' is understood as (i) ultimately a misconception but (ii) conventionally to be accepted: by extension, we must understand that (i) and (ii) must refer to 'agent' as well. Since *Abhidharma* proposes itself as a language for ultimate truths, by this very logic it should exclude such categories as 'agent' – valid only within conventions.

Apart from the more technical implications of the passage, Yaśomitra provides a striking example of the ambiguous relationship between ordinary language and its Buddhist re-descriptions: in effect, he interprets the same passage (and the same verb, *abhidhāvet*) in two opposite manners. In one reading, the *Sūtra*'s warning is against running after the linguistic conventions of the world: in the other, one is warned against transgressing them (literally, running over or going beyond). This double warning, points to a difficult middle way between the mere repetition of ordinary usages at one end, and idiosyncrasy at the other.

Vasubandhu concludes by restating the *Kāśmīravaibhāṣika* position, namely, that 'the eye sees'. This mere statement, though, is by now deprived of any

1988, page 118 and page 147, note 178. The note gives further references to corroborate that *abhidhāvet* may be read in two different ways, but strangely enough does not mention Yaśomitra.

force, as no rebuttal is offered against the *Sautrāntika* objections: this strongly suggests that, in fact, Vasubandhu's own preference is not with the *Vaibhāṣika*.

2.2.3 A counter-position, on agency

The *Abhiḍarmadīpavṛtti* confirms that Vasubandhu was perceived as a critic of *Vaibhāṣika* orthodoxy. Both in the specific instance and in its general thrust, the short work is bent to rectify the *Kośa*'s position by presenting a compendium of *Vaibhāṣika* orthodoxy (not unlike Saṅghabhadra's *Nyāyānusāra*).¹⁷⁴

Regarding the qualm of 'the eye sees', the section of the *vṛtti* discloses the grammatical horizon that rendered the whole discussion possible. It presents a brief discussion of agency, which could well fit in a *vyākaraṇa* treatise.

The author of the *vṛtti* does not actually employ the term *karṭṛ* or *kāraka*, but the example adduced is common to all grammatical discussions of this subject: 'Devadatta cooks the rice'. His remarks echo Patañjali and Jinendrabuddhi, when he decides to explain what constitutes *svatantra* or *prādhāna*.¹⁷⁵ Not only the section explicates the grammatical underpinnings of this Abhidharmic qualm, but also offers further elaboration on the idea of *prādhānya* (the defining trait of an agent) even merely from a grammarian's stance. It is thus worth giving a translation of the entire portion:

Therefore, even when other conditions are there, since the eye has prominence in respect to the action of seeing, it is said just in this way that 'one sees through the eye'. Just like, Devadatta, even when the vessel, water, flame, raw rice and so on are there, as cooking is taking

¹⁷⁴ Collett Cox, *Disputed Dharmas. Early Buddhist Theories on Existence*, Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1995.

¹⁷⁵ As discussed Chapter 1.5.4.

place, has obtained competency in respect to one's own action of placing the kettle, pouring the water, inserting the rice, stirring with the ladle and removing the foam and has got lordship in respect to union with the instruments, because of prominence it is said: 'Devadatta cooks'. When on the other hand there is a wish to express the moistening of the raw rice grains or the cooking, since there is prominence of water or fire there is the designation 'water moistens' or 'fire cooks'. Therefore, an assemblage being there, when seeing is taking place, due to prominence it is said that 'the eye sees'. If one asks 'how is there prominence'? When that is improved, seeing is improved. Since, as the visual consciousness of the first *dhyāna* is equal in the second and the others, an improvement of the seeing is observed due to the improvement of the eye. Therefore it is properly said that 'the eye sees, the *nayana* sees', while in reference to the mind the operation of *prajñā* is metaphorically approximated as 'he sees through the mind'.¹⁷⁶

Most of this argument is analogous to those found in Patañjali's *Mahābhāṣya*, where 'wish to express' (*vivakṣā*) is used to explain how each element is in one sense a *karṭṛ*, in line with his interpretation of *kāraka* as *karoti iti* (therefore, an agent). It also follows Patañjali (like Vasubandhu and Jinendrabuddhi do) in explaining *svātantrya* as prominence instead of literal independence.¹⁷⁷

Moreover, the *ṛtti* offers a precise parameter to identify prominence (*prādhānya*, equal to *svātantrya*), the mark of agency. The eye can be seen to be prominent in the act of vision as the quality of the latter depends from its own quality (not, on the other hand, on the quality of the visual consciousness).

¹⁷⁶ *tasmāt satsv apy anyeṣu pratyayeṣu darśaṇa(na)kriyāyāś cakṣuṣaḥ prādhānyāt tad evāñjasā paśyatīty ucyate | yathā vā devadattaḥ sthālījalajvalanataṇḍulādiṣu satsv api pāke pravartamāne svasyām*

adhiśrayano(yeṇo) dakāśecanataṇḍulāvapanadarvīparighaṭṭanācāmanisravaṇakriyāyām labdhasāmarthyāḥ sādhanasanniyoge ca paraprāptaiśvārya devadattaḥ prādhānyāt pacatīty ucyate | yadā puna(na)s taṇḍulānāḥ vikledo vivakṣitaḥ pāko vā tadā jalānalayoḥ prādhānyād vyapadeśo bhavaty ambu kledayaty agniḥ pacatīti | tasmāt sāmāgryām satyām darśaṇe(ne) pravartamāne prādhānyāt cakṣuḥ paśyatīty ucyate | katham prādhānyam iti cet | tatprakarṣe darśaṇa(na)prakarṣāt | tulye hi prathamadhyānacakṣurvijñāne dvitīyādiṣu cakṣuṣprakarṣād darśanaprakarṣo dīśyate iti | tasmād yuktam uktam cakṣuḥ paśyati nayanaḥ(nam) paśyati manasi tu bhaktyā prajñāṇṛttiḥ upacaryate manasā paśyati iti ||

¹⁷⁷ Dharmakīrti also refers to the importance of the speaker's intention. See *Vādanyāya*, 1.16.

The *Sautrāntika* criticism was based on interpreting *svatantra* literally as ‘independent’, while the *vṛtti*’s reply is in line with the grammatical commentaries, which specify that here *svatantra* means ‘the main one’, the prominent element in an action. In other words, the *Sautrāntikas*’ mistake is in regards to the proper meaning of agency, which, as grammarians had already amply specified, need not imply an actual complete independence, but only a relative one in the sense of prominence among many causal elements. If this is a reply to Vasubandhu, it is in part surprising: since, as we shall see, Vasubandhu’s own views on *prādhānya* accord with this possible criticism, which perhaps misses the issue at stake. Which could be: *when* does Abhidharmic analysis need to dispense with the category of ‘agent’?

Although this discussion is here between *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* (at least, Vasubandhu’s version of the latter’s view), it will in turn help understand Candrakīrti’s stance on agency and its place in conventional descriptions. This qualm, perhaps more than any other, shows the deep interconnectedness of *Abhidharma* and *vyākaraṇa*: the latter is openly employed to decide upon a central matter of correct usage – the identification of an agent acceptable to a specifically Buddhist ontology.

2.2.4 Agents and conventional persons: a passage from the *pudgalaviniścaya* section

Another debate on agency is found in the *Kośa*’s last section: it regards conventional speech about agents, and is in this sense a ‘step removed’ from the technical discussions reported so far.

The *pudgalaviniścaya* is a portion of the *Kośa* especially dedicated to the refutation of the *Vātsīputrīyas*’ doctrine of an indefinable person (*pudgala*) and

of the *Nyāya* doctrine of a permanent self (*ātman*). An entire study has been devoted to this section by Duerlinger, and many of his insights are a useful basis for my discussion (especially as he contrasts Vasubandhu's own views to Candrakīrti's).¹⁷⁸ The grammatical nuances and the stratification of analysis present in the *Kośa*'s treatment of agency, though, are worth greater attention.

In brief, as Duerlinger convincingly argues, Vasubandhu considers that persons (*pudgalas*) exist 'by way of a conception' in the sense of being conventional designation based on a really existent group of *dharma*s: the five *skandhas*. No other person or 'self' is to be found beyond the aggregates.

The series of objections and rebuttals to this position is relatively long and complex, but among them one stands out as an explicit discussion on agency:

If there is no self, who is the agent of these *karmans*, and who is the enjoyer of the results?

'Agent': what is its non-technical sense? The one who acts is the 'agent'. The one who enjoys is the 'enjoyer'.

This is called a synonym, not its sense. 'The agent is the independent one' – thus the specialists in *lakṣaṇas* give a definition of the agent. And only in respect to some work there is somebody's independence. The latter is seen in the world, in cases like Devadatta's bathing, sitting, going and so on.

And whom do you exemplify as Devadatta? If it is the self, the latter is what is to be proved. Or is it the five aggregates? That indeed is the agent. There is, moreover, a threefold *karman*, of the body, speech and mind. Among them, in respect to bodily *karman*, the body engages in it in dependence upon the mind. The mind engages in the body in dependence upon its own cause, and the same is true of the latter:

¹⁷⁸ See J. Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, London: Routledge Courzon, 2003, especially pages 106-107, containing an alternative translation of the section considered. Duerlinger remarks how *pudgalaviniścaya* is the title given by Yaśomitra, while Vasubandhu's own title would be *ātmavādapratīṣedha* (refutation of a doctrine of Self). I have retained the former title, since my interest is in the 'ascertainment of an agent', with which it resounds better.

therefore there is not anyone's whatsoever independence. Since, all existent things occur in dependence upon conditions. Since it is accepted that even the self is not a cause without relying on something else, its independence is not established.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, no 'agent' having such *lakṣaṇa* can be got.

On the other hand, what is the main cause of something is said to be its 'agent'. And the self is not seen to be a cause for anything whatsoever. Therefore, it would not even be an 'agent' of this kind.¹⁸⁰ Since, from recollection comes agitation, from agitation pondering, from pondering effort, from effort wind, from there *karman*, then what does the self do here?¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ Duerlinger: 'Nor is [the existence of the causal] independence of a self that is [defined as a causally] independent [cause] established, since its causality cannot be assumed.' In this case I understand the argument differently. I understand Vasubandhu (and Yaśomitra) as pointing out that even in the opponents' system a self does not have efficacy without coming into play with other causes and conditions. Yaśomitra gives the example of the production of intellection (*buddhi*), which probably refers to the *Nyāya-vaiśeṣika* doctrine that, for a cognition to occur, *manas* must come in conjunction with the *ātman*. This is to explain why, the *ātman* being eternal, we do not know all things at all times. To have a cognition, *ātman* itself needs to be in conjunction with something else. Taking the argument as Duerlinger does deprives it of its force, since here Vasubandhu is employing a premise accepted by the opponent – not simply saying that 'causality cannot be assumed'. The difference in our translations depends mainly from our rendering as *abhyupagamāt*. Duerlinger understanding of the compound makes it to my eyes extremely awkward. His reading could have been justified if we found **kāraṇatva-anabhyupagamāt*, but what we have is *akāraṇatva-abhyupagamāt* and I see no reason to take the *nañ* in reference to *abhyupagamāt* instead of in reference to *kāraṇatva*.

¹⁸⁰ Duerlinger: 'But should the cause [of an action of body, for instance,] be called an agent, then since we do not at all perceive a self that is [such] a cause, a self is not even an agent in this sense.'

In this translation, the *main* word is missing. That word is no other than 'main', and its absence renders the grammatical reference in Vasubandhu's argument undetectable. In effect, I do not even think that there is any reason to take this definition of agency as an opponent's objection – I believe this is a definition of agency given by Vasubandhu. Moreover, Duerlinger's translation does away with the relative clause, which stylistically marks a definition.

¹⁸¹ *asaty ātmani ka eṣāṁ karmaṇāṁ kartā kaś ca phalānāṁ bhoktā bhavati | karteti | ka eṣa bāhyārthaḥ | karotīti kartā | bhuṅkta iti bhoktā | paryāya ucyate nārthaḥ | svatantraḥ kartā iti kartṛlakṣaṇam ācakṣate lākṣaṇikāḥ | asti punaḥ kvacid eva kārye kasyacit svātantryam | loke dṛṣṭaṁ devadattasya snānāsanaḥkarmāṇāṁ | kaḥ punar bhavān devadattam udāharati | yady ātmānam | sa eva sādhyah | atha pañcaskandhakam | sa eva kartā | trividhaṁ cedāṁ karma kāyavāñmanaskarma | tatra kāyakarmaṇi tāvat kāyasya cittaparatantṛ vṛttiḥ | cittasyāpi kāye svakāraṇaparatantrā vṛttiḥ tasyāpy evam iti nāsti kasyacid api svātantryam | pratyayaparatantrā hi sarve bhāvāḥ pravartante | ātmano'pi ca nirapekṣasyākāraṇatvābhyupagamān na svātantryaṁ sidhyati | tasmān naivāṁlakṣaṇa upalabhyate kaścit kartā | yat tu yasya pradhānakāraṇaṁ tat tasya kartety ucyate | na ca ātmanaḥ kvacid api kāraṇatvaṁ dṛśyate | tasmāt sa evam api na kartā yujyate | smṛtito hi*

The passage echoes the discussions of agency found in grammatical commentaries from Patañjali onwards. The important move, in fact, is to criticise a literal interpretation of *svātantrya* as independence, replacing it with the notion of predominance (*prādhānya*, which is the same gloss given by the *Mahābhāṣyakāra*). In other words, the agent is not really independent, but is the main element in the accomplishment of the action: this position being identical to the *Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti* portion analysed earlier. What is more, Vasubandhu argues for the lack of independence with an explicit mention of the necessity of causes and conditions to bring about the action: this argument is also found in the section of Jinendrabuddhi's commentary discussed in Chapter 1. If we exclude Jinendrabuddhi's reference *vivakṣā* (analogous to the *Vibhāṣāprabhāvṛtti*), his reasoning towards equating *svātantrya* and *prādhānya* is identical. This equation, it is worth repeating, goes back to at least Patañjali, and does not really rest upon the acceptance of a self. Since, as Vasubandhu points out, for a self to accomplish an act, an assemblage of conditions is required even in some of the opponents' views.

The passage makes some important points. A proper understanding of agency cannot take the definition of an agent as independent too literally, but should interpret independence as causal prominence. In either definition, though, a permanent self would not qualify as an agent, either because its agency is absent independently from other causes, or because other causes can be shown to have efficacy without a self being posited. Most relevantly, in conventional

cchandaḥ cchandād vitarkaḥ vitarkāt prayatnaḥ prayatnād vāyuḥ tataḥ karmaṇi kim atrātmā kurute || My translation is quite different from Duerlinger, both in general as well as in specific instances. I have marked some of the latter in the previous notes, but an overarching difference is in the manner I divide objections and rebuttals: this is no small difference, as it results in a rather contrasting reading of Vasubandhu's main arguments.

speech about persons performing actions, the ultimate referent of the designation 'agent' is no other than the five aggregates.

2.3 'Self' as indirect reference

In the *Abhidharmakośa*, Vasubandhu needs to explain why the internal entrances are called *ādhyātmika*, which means literally, 'close to the self': while, in fact, there is no self. This is a fitting example of the overlapping of two types of language, as highlighted by Waldron.¹⁸² The first is the synchronic analysis in terms of ultimate, momentary *dharma*s; the second involves continuation through time, thus, *samsāra* – and ordinary conventions.

Vasubandhu explains that, through metaphor, or by approximation, consciousness can be called *ātman*. These are some possible ways to render the term *upacāra*, etymologically akin to 'going near' (thus, 'approximation'). *Upacāra* is also employed to refer to secondary usages, where the literal meaning of the term does not fit the context. An example is the sentence 'this student is fire' (*agnir mānavakaḥ*). The intention is to identify certain qualities of fire with the student's own: the student is not, *literally*, fire.¹⁸³

Just like fire actually refers to the student, *ātman* is considered to be an *upacāra* for consciousness. The latter absolves many of the functions otherwise ascribed

¹⁸² William S. Waldron, *The Buddhist unconscious. The ālaya-vijñāna in the context of Indian Buddhist Thought*. London: Routledgecurzon, 2003.

¹⁸³ On *lakṣaṇā* and *upacāra* as secondary usage, see K.K. Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning*, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1963, chapter 6. The section treating of the Buddhist usage of *lakṣaṇā*, though, seems to conflate the views about language of several different schools (*Madhyamaka*, *Yogācāra* and *Pramāṇavāda* are treated as a seamless theoretical whole).

See also David S. Ruegg, *Buddha-nature, Mind and the Problem of Gradualism is a Comparative Perspective*, Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1992, pages 26-35. Ruegg is more sensitive to the specificities of a Buddhist context, and in his treatment recognises a significant thread through *vyākaraṇa*, *alamkāraśāstra* and Buddhist philosophy of interpretation. We may say that at least three ideas of *alamkāraśāstra* apply quite well to Buddhist texts: *upamā* or simile (see for example the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*); *upacāra* or secondary usage; and *dhvani* or suggestion, if we follow Ruegg's analysis.

to the eternal *ātman*, like being the innermost, or being that, which continues from one life to the next despite the destruction of the bodily elements. On the other hand, consciousness is not, literally, a self: since such a thing as a self, i.e. a permanent and independently existent essence, simply does not exist (in a Buddhist context). Thus, the structure of this *upacāra* fits the sense of 'secondary usage', as in the example of 'this student is fire'.

One meaning of *upacāra* is that of a courtesy, for example the acts of politeness prescribed for a guest in one's house. In this last sense, the employment of *ātman* is a 'courtesy' towards worldly conventions.¹⁸⁴

2.4 Conclusion

The main purpose of this Chapter was not merely to reconstruct specific Abhidharmic debates, but rather to show how they bear on two issues: the nature of *lakṣaṇas*, and the role of *vyākaraṇa*. The arguments have accordingly been discussed in a somewhat selective light, trying to focus on the aspects of the debates that either explicitly or implicitly involved some theoretical position on *lakṣaṇas* and on the role of *vyākaraṇa*.

¹⁸⁴ As Sthiramati remarks, all linguistic usages are a type of secondary indication: 'There is no direct referent of a word, since it (the referent) is beyond the scope all naming through knowledge...on the other hand, all of this is secondary usage, there is no primary usage.' As also quoted by Raja, note 3 page 247: *mukhyapadārtho nāsti, tasya sarvajñānābhidhānaviśayātikrāntatvāt...api ca sarva evāyaṁ gaṇa eva, na mukhyo 'sti* || Raja interprets Nāgārjuna's *Vigrahavyāvartanī* as having the same purport, but his reference to *arthakriyākāritā* suggests a conflation of early *Madhyamaka* with later *Pramāṇavāda* views on language and its functionality. See Chapter 5 for more on this.

I differ from Waldron's interpretation of this section. Waldron states that '[...] in the Abhidharmakośa it is *citta*... that the unenlightened beings (mis)take for the self.' This suggests a rather negative sense of the term *upacāra*, while *upacāra* is described as a conscious concession, even employed by the Buddha. Moreover, it is a standard Abhidharmic position that any of the five *skandhas*, can be taken as a self (not just *citta*). This position is explicitly endorsed by Vasubandhu, in verse 1.20 and its commentary. But see William S. Waldron, *The Buddhist unconscious. The ālaya-vijñāna in the context of Indian Buddhist Thought*. London: Routledgecurzon, 2003, page 120. Note 68 makes it clear that we are dealing with the same passage.

One of my contentions, which I hope this Chapter corroborates, is that it is fruitful to look closely even when a text does not present itself as being directly discussing a certain issue. It is often the case that important presuppositions happen to be treated as incidental topics. There is in fact some rationale in this: the most fundamental presuppositions of a debate are the most difficult to draw out, and may become visible only when the debaters push their arguments further and further from their initial concerns. Sometimes commentators round up a long debate by saying ‘enough with this side issue’ (*alam prasāṅgena*). This may in fact signal the opposite: if the debate’s length was worth noticing, the ‘side issue’ may contain very crucial points.

On the topics treated in this Chapter, more could be said by drawing from other sections of Vasubandhu and Yaśomitra’s texts alone; and obviously, from the *Abhidharma* texts preserved in Tibetan and Chinese. I could have employed more sources, but I trust I have drawn from an adequate number of primary sources to substantiate my arguments and contentions. It will be seen that the sections I analysed have significant similarities with both *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* works addressing analogous questions; and also, that the similarities may help understand the positions of those *Mahāyāna* philosophers.

Chapter 3

Lakṣaṇas and the emptiness of *lakṣaṇas*

Free from *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*, not exemplified through words,
You saw this world as pacified, with your eye of *jñāna*.¹⁸⁵

Nāgārjuna

Madhyamaka philosophy may be interpreted as a critique of the metaphysical underpinnings of *Abhidharmic* language: Nāgārjuna discarded the ontological weight of the world of *dharma*s, to understand them as mere surface and convention.¹⁸⁶

I have so far described a milieu that posed great emphasis on definitions/characteristics (*lakṣaṇas*). This is true both of *sāstra* literature as a

¹⁸⁵ *lakṣyalakṣaṇanirmuktaṁ vāgudāhāravārjitaṁ | sāntaṁ jagad idaṁ dṛṣṭaṁ bhavatā
jñānacakṣuṣā || Lokāṭīṣṭava, 12.*

¹⁸⁶ Generally, Nāgārjuna has referred to positions akin to the *Vaibhāṣika*; and his successors (as far as I know) did not discuss explicitly the *Theravāda* stance. One could therefore wonder as to whether the main lines of argument would apply to the latter school as well.

One consideration, though, makes me think that it is so. Pieris has reconstructed the *Theravāda* employment of the term *sabhāva* (Skt. *svabhāva*), and some of his remarks are here significant. First of all, *Theravāda* commentators openly reject a position similar to the *Madhyamaka* as ‘rubbish’, discarding the idea that ‘[...] what is arisen is void of the reality of being arisen (*jāti-sabhāvena*), or that birth-death-decay is void in terms of their reality (*taṁ-sabhāvena*)’ (page 189). To this, Pieris remarks that ‘[...] interpreting “void in terms of *sabhāva*” as “void in terms of existence” is negated by insisting that the constituents of existence or *dhammā* such as visible form, etc., **truly exist** and that voidness is not to be equated with their non-existence.’ (page 190, emphasis is the author’s own). If Pieris’ interpretation is sound, *Madhyamaka* critique would then equally apply to their notion of *svabhāva*, however different it may be from the *Vaibhāṣika*’s.

See A. Pieris, ‘*Sabhāvadhamma*: a Pali Ābhidharmika Neologism and Its Probable Meaning’, in *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 1, Sri Lanka: Centre for Buddhist Studies, 2003, pages 186-206.

whole, regulated by *vyākaraṇa*, and of the more specialised concern of Buddhist *Abhidharma*. Both produced, and employed, shared *lakṣaṇas*, which shaped their analysis and technical usages.

Within a Buddhist context, the shift from *dharma*s to their emptiness brings the focus upon the *status* of *lakṣaṇas*, as opposed to their sound formation. A *Vaibhāṣika* text is mostly concerned with giving viable *lakṣaṇas*, while any discussion on their ontological status (like the one reproduced in Chapter 2) appears as a detour within a broader discussion. *Dharma*s are selfless, not because the *lakṣaṇas* themselves are empty, but because no *dharma* with the *lakṣaṇas* of a 'self' may be ultimately found. *Madhyamaka*, on the other hand, examines whether these *lakṣaṇas* may be in any sense ultimate. By shifting the attention to definability itself, *Madhyamaka* provides an analysis that could always resolve its referents as empty. Falling necessarily within the interdependent pair of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*, nothing is immune to analysis.

Such dialectic is the analytical tool with widest possible applicability: many refutations can be read as specific instances of this argument.¹⁸⁷ Two short texts exemplify well the shift of emphasis towards emptiness, as the emptiness of *lakṣaṇas*.

¹⁸⁷ Tachikawa noticed as much, although he did not mention that *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* are the basic 'variables' at play:

In this system it is propositions describing two entities standing in a relationship of dependent co-arising to one another that represent the focus of discussion and serve as the pivot for all subsequent logical developments.

See M. Tachikawa, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Nāgārjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997, page 35.

3.1 The *Lokāṭītastava* and the *Heart Sūtra*: emptiness as lack of characteristics

Besides the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, a number of ‘minor’ works are attributed to Nāgārjuna. Many of such works resemble the *Kārikā* in style and subject matter, occasionally expanding upon certain topics. This can be said of the *Lokāṭītastava*.

Expositions of *Madhyamaka* will necessarily rely on the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* as their fundamental source. Here, though, I will start from the *Lokāṭītastava* for the following two reasons: i.) the *Lokāṭītastava* is structurally akin to the *Hṛdayasūtra*, to the extent that it could be read as a commentary to the latter; ii.) it influenced Candrakīrti’s interpretation of Nāgārjuna, especially in terms of equating emptiness with lack of characteristics (*lakṣaṇas*).

The relationship between the *Hṛdayasūtra* and the *Stava* regards primarily the gradual sequence presented in both texts. This sequence corroborates an interpretation of *Madhyamaka* as allowing graded conventions, so that emptiness is approached from a specific framework of conventional truths.

The second point provides a useful key to some distinctive features of Candrakīrti’s thought: namely, its relation to *vyākaraṇa*, *Abhidharma*, *Yogācāra* and non-Buddhist Indian philosophies.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Ruegg has commented upon the difficulty in reading Candrakīrti’s philosophical language, especially with reference to the wide background of erudition that informs it: while listing the sources of Candrakīrti’s thought, he in effect starts by saying that ‘[...]his exposition and argument presuppose on the part of the reader a high degree of familiarity with grammar (*vyākaraṇa*)[...]’, while the other sources include *Abhidharma* and non-Buddhist philosophies. As the very structure of my thesis suggests, I agree with this gradation, which is in some sense a gradation of *lakṣaṇas*. See David S. Ruegg, *Two prolegomena to Madhyamaka philosophy*, Wien: Universitat Wien, 2002, page 8.

Candrakīrti's exposition of the two truths can be read as an analysis of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*, and of their status. Nāgārjuna had provided a precedent for this, in the *Lokāūtastava*. Their treatment of the pair of *lakṣya/lakṣaṇa* may open some insight into Nāgārjuna's own understanding of his other analyses. The *Prasannapadā* quotes from the *Stava* while engaging its longest discussion of the topic.

3.1.2 From the aggregates to their emptiness

The first verse of the *Lokāūtā* suggests its relation to *Prajñāpāramitā* texts, as the Buddha is praised as *viviktajñānavedine*. Even on the strength of the Tibetan translation as *dben pa'i ye śes rig gyur pa*, we may take the compound *viviktajñāna* as either *ṣaṣṭhātaturuṣa* or as a *karmadhāraya*: thus, *vivikta* is a noun, or an adjective. The Tibetan choice of *dben pa'i ye śes rig gyur pa* makes it plausibly related to its usages in the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, as in *prajñāpāramitā viviktā*, in this case in a sense akin to 'empty'.¹⁸⁹

The second half of the same verse can be also read as referring to Śākyamuni's previous training as a Bodhisattva. It seems unlikely that *ciram* would be used for a few years of training within one life (the six years of Gautama's intense austerity). An anonymous commentary upon the *Lokāūtā* glosses *ciram* with *āsaṃsārāt*, which would also better fit a *Mahāyāna* context, perhaps in reference to *ādibuddha*.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Lindtner translates it as 'versed in the cognition of the void'. Christian Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nagarjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987. Nāgārjuna's work has been traditionally (and plausibly) linked to the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*, to the extent that the first verse of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is found embedded in the short *Kauśikaprajñāpāramitāsūtra*.

As the very word *Mahāyāna* occurs in verse 27 of the *stava*, there is little doubt about its belonging to this stream.¹⁹¹ Through an outline of their basic structures, its similarity to the *Hṛdayasūtra* in particular, may become apparent.

The core of the *Sūtra* is a dialogue between Śāriputra and Avalokiteśvara. The *bodhisattva*, while training in the Perfection of Wisdom, had seen the five *skandhas* and (ca) had seen their empty nature. Inspired by Śākyamuni, Śāriputra asks Avalokiteśvara how a Bodhisattva should train in the Perfection of Wisdom. The answer is that he or she should first see the five *skandhas*, then, see their empty nature. (Śāriputra only mentions a male Bodhisattva, but Avalokiteśvara specifies that it is 'he or she'). 'Form is emptiness' (*rūpaṃ śūnyatā*) and 'emptiness is no other than form' (*rūpān na pṛthak śūnyatā*), and this is also true of the other four *skandhas*. We could plausibly say that this is the centre of Avalokiteśvara's reply.

Avalokiteśvara's realisation as well as the proposed training for an aspiring Bodhisattva begins by seeing the five *skandhas*, the Abhidharmic deconstruction of a living being into mental and non-mental constituents. Neither starts on the basis of the rough conventionalities of the untrained and proposes to directly see their emptiness: the *skandhas* have to be seen first. This is an important feature of the manner I understand *Madhyamaka*, and is a recurrent structure of many other *Mahāyāna* scriptures.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ See Appendix 2. I have not yet been able to establish whether this commentary is the same as the *Akāraṭīkā*, reproduced by Lindtner in *Nāgārjuniana*, since I find the photos difficult to read. I will occasionally refer to this work in this Chapter.

¹⁹¹ *atas tvayā mahāyāne tat sākalyena darśitam* || 27c.

¹⁹² Other texts by Nāgārjuna, like the *Pratītyasamutpādaḥṛdayakārikā*, present the same gradation. For another clear example in a *Mahāyāna* scripture, see the *Suvarṇaprabhāsottamasūtra*, *Śūnyatāparivarta*.

Verses 2 and 3 of the *Lokātītastava* present an analogous gradation. Nāgārjuna first declares that there is no living being (*na sattvo 'sti*) apart from the *skandhas* (*skandhamātravinirmuktaḥ*). And to the intelligent ones, the Buddha showed even the *skandhas* to be like a dream or an illusion: empty. Here too, there is no indication that the conventional validity of the five *skandhas* should be discarded. On the other hand, the ascertainment of ultimate emptiness passes through a prior observation of the five aggregates.

The *Sūtra* asserts the emptiness of the five *skandhas*, and Nāgārjuna offers their dialectical refutation. This is a common difference between *sūtras* and *śāstras*: the latter offer reasoned demonstrations and expositions of what the former state or imply.

The Heart *Sūtra* expands upon its initial assertions, by declaring that all *dharma*s are emptiness (*śūnyatā*), devoid of characteristics (*alakṣaṇāḥ*), non-ceased (*aniruddhāḥ*), not stained or stainless (*amala-avimalāḥ*)¹⁹³ not lacking (*anūnāḥ*) and not full (*asampūrṇāḥ*). Of all these qualifications, the first two are particularly significant for *Madhyamaka* thought, where ultimate truth can be explained through the equation of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) with lack of characteristics.

The six verses of the *Lokātītastava* devoted to the refutation of the *skandhas*, appeal to both types of definitions treated in the first two Chapters: those of *vyākaraṇa* and those of *Abhidharma*.

¹⁹³ These compounds could be analysed differently. For *śūnyatālakṣaṇāḥ* could be taken as one *tatpuruṣa*, while *amalāvimālāḥ* could be taken as two different words. I owe this to the comparison with the Tibetan translation, which excludes certain possibilities, and in particular to the guidance of Ven.T.Gyaltzen.

Verse 3 refutes form (*rūpa*, the aggregate of materiality). According to Abhidharmic analysis, *rūpa* is composed of the 'four great elements' (*mahābhūtāni*).¹⁹⁴ The latter are not as such perceptible, while *rūpa*, their derivative, can be perceived.¹⁹⁵ Here Nāgārjuna retorts that it is self-contradictory to describe *rūpa* as perceptible, while denying the same of its constituent elements: brown wood, for example, will not make for a green table. Thus, *rūpa* is refuted.¹⁹⁶

Vedanā (feeling or sensation) cannot be ultimately existent, due to the reciprocal dependence of sensation and something to be sensed (*vedanīya*). This type of argument is structurally akin to the arguments about *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*.

The refutation of *saṃjñā* is based upon a pun. The Tibetan translation as *min* fails to reproduce the two possible senses of the original, and obscures the fact that what appears in the six verses is none other than the names of the five *skandhas*. *Saṃjñā* does not only signify a word or appellation (*min*), but also the aggregate of notion. Lindtner is aware of the problem, and he translates here as:

'concept [= a name, *min*']'.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁴ The *Abhidharmakośa*'s stance is that *rūpa* comprises the five *indriyas* and the five types of *avijñaptis* (1,9a). When this is fit within a theory of great elements, the latter are counted as four (1,12a).

¹⁹⁵ Nāgārjuna uses the expression *a-cakṣur-grāhyāṇi* to refer to the great elements. It literally means 'not to be apprehended by the eye', but it can be sensibly interpreted as referring to all the sense faculties. The word *pratyakṣa*, meaning direct sense-perception, gets its meaning through the same type of extension.

¹⁹⁶ A slightly different argument to refute the aggregate of form is found in *Śūnyatāsaptati*, 45.

¹⁹⁷ Christian Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana: Studies in the Writings and Philosophy of Nagarjuna*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1987, page 131. I am indebted to Prof. David S. Ruegg for bringing my attention to the fact that the Tibetan translation did not choose to render *saṃjñā* with the word normally employed to refer to the aggregate.

The literal meaning of the refutation depends upon the sense of *saṃjñā* as 'word', which explains the Tibetan rendering. Word and referent (*saṃjñā* and *artha*) cannot be established as either same or different. If they were identical then 'the mouth would be burnt by fire'.¹⁹⁸ If different, they could not be related, thus no meaning could be understood from any word. This dialectic can actually apply, through some modification, to *saṃjñā* as a *skandha* (which, as Stcherbatsky also noticed, is related to word-meaning).¹⁹⁹ The precise relationship between word and notion, though, is a complex point of discussion and would require much more extensive treatment than the present context may allow.

3.1.3 The meaning of autonomy and the absence of God

The treatment of *saṃskāraskandha* is significant for one more reason yet: Nāgārjuna begins with a paraphrase of Pāṇini, the only one I am aware of in his texts. The verse starts by stating that the Buddha, conventionally, spoke of *kartā svatantraḥ* and also of *karman*. *Kartā svatantraḥ* can be split in two ways: as *kartā + svatantraḥ* or as *kartā + asvatantraḥ*. The commentary follows the second option:

¹⁹⁸ On the frequency and significance of this example in different, independent traditions, see Jan E.M. Houben, 'Semantics in the history of South Asian thought', in Madhav M. Deshpande and Peter E. Hook (eds.), *Indian Linguistic Studies. Festschrift in Honor of George Cardona*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2002, especially page 205. Note 5 in the same page quotes the *Nyāyasūtra*, which Nāgārjuna must have known very well, if we accept the *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* to be his work. Houben points out that in all the traditions analysed, this or similar examples are used to refute certain 'pre-theoretic ideas' such as 'an unreflective common sense approach to language and reality' which 'may tend to identify the word with the referent'. It is to be marked that according to *Madhyamaka* analysis, it is impossible to establish a relation when two things are not identical - and also when they *are* identical. This presupposition is at the basis of many refutations, not only the one at hand, but also the more well-known analysis of *satkāryavāda* and its opposite (the identity or difference of cause and effect).

For this specific argument and its expansion, see also *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*, verse 52 and commentary.

¹⁹⁹ Th. Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, New York: Dover Publications, 1962.

There is, what? An agent like a 'Lord' and so on. How is he? Not autonomous, depending on an assemblage like (?) and so on. There is, what? An object of the action. How is it? Not autonomous, dependent on something else, depending on the agent. It is said, uttered, what? This pair. How? In transactional usage, conventionally. There is, what? The establishment. How is it? Opined, accepted. By whom? By you. Of what? Of these two, agent and object of the action. How is it? Mutually dependent. How? On the other hand...²⁰⁰

The possibility to read the verse as *kartā + asvatantraḥ* did not occur to Lindtner, but it is both grammatically sound and stylistically justified. It is a feature of Buddhist authors in general and of Nāgārjuna in particular, to exploit simple inversions by the addition of a single word or particle.²⁰¹

The word *īśvara*, translated here as 'Lord', is used in Sanskrit literature in at least two different senses. It can refer to a powerful god, with a remarkable level of agency within the world, but still not omnipotent nor eternal: in particular, it is often a synonym of *Śiva*. This type of 'Lord' is acceptable within Buddhist cosmology, and would correspond to a 'conventional' one, dependent upon causes and conditions.

The second sense is that of an ultimate 'Lord', omnipotent and eternal creator of the universe: God. This is what does not find a place in Buddhist cosmology,

²⁰⁰ *asti kaḥ kartā īśvarādīḥ kiṃviśiṣṭaḥ asvatantraḥ ebhivyādi(?)sāmagryadhūnaḥ asti kiṃ tat karma kiṃviśiṣṭaṃ asvatantraṃ parāyattaṃ kartradhūnaṃ uktāṃ bhāṇitāṃ kim etadvayaṃ kuto vyavahārataḥ saṃvṛtyā asti kā siddhiḥ kiṃbhūtā abhīmatā svīkṛtā kasya te tava kayor anayoḥ karṭṛkarmaṇoḥ kiṃbhūtā parasparāpekṣikī kathāṃ tu ||8||*

Please see the Appendix 2, image 3, for the many differences from the actual manuscript. For example, instead of *asvatantra*, the manuscript consistently has *aśvatantra*, but I frankly doubt Nāgārjuna wished to say that agents and objects of the actions are conventionally propelled by horses.

²⁰¹ This was first brought to my attention by Dr.K.Srinivasan, in reference to *Nāgānanda*, where a similar verse occurs in two very different contexts, acquiring a dramatically divergent meaning the second time (1.18 and 5.33). Nāgārjuna himself offers examples of this (as in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.1 versus 24.20) and the same stylistic device is used by Śāntideva for different purposes (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 6.10).

and what Buddhist authors take great pains to refute. In this instance, the refutation rests on what grammatical commentaries themselves point out. Any agent depends upon a causal assemblage: hence there is no ultimate *svatantra* if we understand the word to mean 'independent'.

The difference between convention and ultimate analysis is *not* here in the fact that, conventionally the agent is autonomous while it is not so ultimately. Both conventionally and ultimately the agent is analysed as non-autonomous, and the same is true of the *karman*. Except that: conventionally, the agent is taken to be dependent from a causal assemblage, while ultimately it is dependent on the *karman* too. In other words, conventionally one may agree with the grammarians, who speak of a predominant agent while being aware of the agent's dependence on a causal assemblage. Ultimately, though, the *kāraṅkas* themselves are mutually established.

The alternative reading of the verse is to split *kartā svatantraḥ* so that it means 'autonomous agent'. In this case, the verse means that the Buddha spoke of an autonomous agent only conventionally. This is not dissimilar to what the grammatical commentaries tell us: 'autonomy' is only contextual, hence conventional, and is to be understood as causal prominence, rather than causal independence. Following this reading, the wording is identical to Pāṇini's *sūtra* that defines agency (*svatantraḥ kartā*).

Nāgārjuna shifts with ease from the *lakṣaṇas* of *Abhidharma* to those of Pāṇini, suggesting he regards both ~~has~~ having force. As we have seen, this is a characteristic of *Abhidharma* literature as well: even more so, it will be seen, this feature is prominent in Nāgārjuna's great commentator, Candrakīrti.

Vijñāna, the fifth aggregate, is refuted by appealing to the mutual dependence of cognition (*jñāna*) and something to be cognised (*jñeya*). The argument is not dissimilar to the one employed for *vedanā*.²⁰²

We can therefore see that the modes of refutation for each of the aggregates are not identical in each case, although there are occasional recurrences. Nāgārjuna himself, though, offers a red thread that runs through the five refutations and constitutes their blueprint or fundamental principle, in the following verse.

3.1.4 Beyond the world, beyond characteristics

Concluding his examination of the five aggregates, Nāgārjuna points out that *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* are mutually dependent. Verse 11 does not constitute the refutation of a specific aggregate; it follows the section on the aggregates and precedes a verse of a different tenor. This suggests that the statement on the emptiness of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* is given as the primary rationale underlying all the preceding refutations: as the fundamental dialectical structure, of which each previous argument is but a specified application. The *skandhas* can be deconstructed, by questioning their definability: the latter always stems from the interdependent pair of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*. As in the Heart *Sūtra*, the first synonym of the emptiness of the *skandhas* is the absence of *lakṣaṇas*.

I have quoted the subsequent verse at the beginning of this Chapter. Here we find no refutation, but a hint at the fruit and purpose of the previous analysis. Absence of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* entails inexpressibility; thus, the world is 'bereft of exemplification through speech' (*vāgudāhāraṇa*). It is also 'pacified'

²⁰² In effect, verse 39 of the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* (the one edited and translated by Lindtner) refers to both *vijñāna* and *vedanā*:

śes pas śes bya rtogs pa te || śes bya med par śes pa med || de ltar na ni rig bya dan || rig byed med ces cis mi 'dod ||

See also *Acintyastava* 50a: *jñāne sati yathā jñeyan jñeye jñānan tathā sati ||*

(*śāntam*). *Lakṣya* can also mean a goal, like, literally, the target of an arrow. As Śāntideva will tell us, without referents, 'due to the absence of any other way, the mind is pacified'.²⁰³ Thus, the recognition of the empty nature of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* has an obvious soteriological significance.

The symmetry between the *sūtra* and the *stava* continues in the following verses. The next two synonyms of emptiness listed by Avalokiteśvara are 'non-arisen' (*anutpanna*) and 'non-ceased' (*aniruddha*), and verses 13-19 deal in fact with the ultimate impossibility of production or cessation.²⁰⁴

Other similarities may be found, but this much is enough to highlight the recurring feature I commented upon at the outset: in both cases, the starting point is the *lakṣaṇas* of the *Abhidharma*. The analysis in terms of aggregates and so forth, suffices to deconstruct a person into its constituent *dharma*s: subsequently, the *dharma*s themselves are understood as empty. This gradation is to be found both in the *prajñāpāramitā* literature (the Heart *Sūtra* being only one example²⁰⁵) and in the *Lokāṭīstava*: and these are important sources for Candrakīrti's own exegesis of *Madhyamaka*.

In that respect, it is sensible to examine whether and how the conventions of *Abhidharma* constitute the starting point of Candrakīrti's analysis: I will

²⁰³ *tadanyagatyabhāvena nirālambā praśamyate || Bodhicaryāvatāra 9.34.*

²⁰⁴ In particular, verse 13 deals with the impossibility of arising (*utpāda*); verse 14 refutes cessation (*vināśa=nirodha*); verse 15 and 16 discuss the identity or difference between an existent thing (*bhāva*) and disappearance (*vināśa*); verse 17 analyses whether the effect (*kārya*) can arise from a cause which has already ceased, or one who has not; verse 18 applies this to the example of the seed and sprout (*bīja* and *aṅkura*); verse 19 draws the conclusion that the world (*jagat*) is therefore born from a misconception (*parikalpasamudbhavam*) and hence, being unarisen, does not cease (*anutpannam na naśyati*).

²⁰⁵ In Chapter 2 I have extensively quoted from the *Vajracchedikā* as another text talking about *lakṣaṇas* and their absence.

dedicate several sections of the following to that end. In the present Chapter the issue will be analysed from the perspective of a discussion about defining traits (*lakṣaṇa*) and their proper status.

That *lakṣaṇas* and their emptiness may be the central theme of the *Lokātīta* is also corroborated by the anonymous commentary to the *stava*, in its concluding gloss:

‘Praise of the one gone beyond the world’ means: the three worlds, called desire, form and formless; gone beyond, removed from those, because of having gone beyond all *lakṣaṇas* and *dharmas*, the *stava*, the praise, of that *Tathāgata*.²⁰⁶

3.2 Candrakīrti and *lakṣaṇas*

Candrakīrti offers a sustained analysis of the status of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* in several sections of the *Prasannapadā*. His position is partly derived from the *Lokātīta*, and plausibly from the vast array of *Mahāyāna Sūtras* he quotes throughout the commentary. It may be summarised in three main points:

- i. in the highest sense (*paramārthataḥ*) all phenomena (*dharmas*) are empty. The pair of characteristic and characterised (*lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*), which would individuate them, is mutually dependent, thus un-established;
- ii. being mutually dependent, on the other hand, allows for conventional validity. The same parameter, which established ultimate emptiness, makes conventions possible;

²⁰⁶ *lokātīta*stavaḥ lokāś trayāḥ kāmārūpārūpyākhyāḥ tebhyo’ūto’pagataḥ sarvalakṣaṇadharmātītatvāt yas tathāgataḥ tasya stavas stutir itī ||
Once again please see Appendix 2, image 10, for the original text, which I have edited to obtain sensible readings.

iii. some types of descriptions are to be preferred to others. Some philosophers offer models that do not fit in either of the two truths as just described, and others still, are prey of poor reasoning.

The first two points are asserted in the *Prasannapadā* both as general statements, as well as in reference to specific instances.

3.2.1 The basic status of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*

An overarching discussion of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* appears in the commentary to *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 1.1. Here Candrakīrti attacks the *Yogācāra* ideas of *svalakṣaṇa* and *sāmānyalakṣaṇa* (in the sense in which they are used in Dignāga's system). He quotes two verses of Nāgārjuna, both showing the ultimate non-existence of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*. The first verse is from the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* itself, while the second is the passage of the *Lokāṭīta* I have analysed above. To the latter, Candrakīrti provides a relatively elaborate commentary:

Moreover, that *lakṣaṇa* might be either different or non-different from the *lakṣya*. Among the two possibilities, if it is different, then due to its being different from the *lakṣya* even the *lakṣaṇa* would not be a *lakṣaṇa*. And due to its being like the non-*lakṣya*, different from the *lakṣaṇa*, even the *lakṣya*, would not be *lakṣya*. In the same way, the *lakṣaṇa* being different from the *lakṣya*, the *lakṣya* would be independent of the *lakṣaṇa*. And therefore that would not be *lakṣya*, due to its independence from the *lakṣaṇa*: like a flower in the sky. Or, if *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* are not different, then, since it is non-distinct from the *lakṣaṇa*, like the *lakṣaṇa*'s very self, the *lakṣya* lacks the state of being *lakṣya*. And since it is not distinct from the *lakṣya*, like the *lakṣya*'s very self, even the *lakṣaṇa* would not have the nature of *lakṣaṇa*. As it has also been said:

'If the *lakṣaṇa* is other from the *lakṣya*, that *lakṣya* would be without *lakṣaṇa*;
and you very clearly told of their non-existence in case of its being not other.'

And there is no other way to establish *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* apart from as same or different.²⁰⁷

The argument of sameness and difference is retraced to *Lokātītastava* 12. That no third is given between identity and difference is an axiom of *Madhyamaka* dialectics. The implication of the passage amounts to what I described in point i.): the reciprocal dependence of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* makes them ultimately empty.

On the other hand, two other passages in the same section clarify how the reciprocally dependent *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* have to be conventionally accepted:

In this way, even though in the case of earth and the rest when scrutinised there is no *lakṣya* apart from hardness and so on, and apart from the *lakṣya* the *lakṣaṇa* is without basis, still, just conventionally, the Ācāryas have been positing their establishment through a reciprocally dependent establishment of both. And this should necessarily be accepted. Since otherwise, conventions would not cease to be fit when reasoned about: and that would itself be reality (*tattva*), not conventions.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ *kīṅca bhedenā vā tal lakṣaṇaṁ lakṣyāt syāt abhedena vā | tatra yadī tāvad bhedenā tadā lakṣyād bhinnatvād alakṣaṇam api na lakṣaṇam | lakṣaṇāc ca bhinnatvād alakṣyaval lakṣyam api na lakṣyam | tathā lakṣyād bhinnatvāl lakṣaṇasya lakṣaṇanirapekṣaṁ lakṣyaṁ syāt | tataś ca na tal lakṣyaṁ lakṣaṇanirapekṣatvāt khaṇuṣpavat | athābhinne lakṣyalakṣaṇe, tadā lakṣaṇād avyatiriktatvāl lakṣaṇasvātmavād vihitāte lakṣyasya lakṣyatā | lakṣyāc cāvyatiriktatvāl lakṣyasvātmavāl lakṣaṇam api na lakṣaṇasvabhāvam | yathā cōktam: lakṣyāl lakṣaṇam anyac cet syāt tal lakṣyam alakṣaṇam |*
tayor abhāvo'nanyatve viśeṣaṁ kathitaṁ tvayā || iti || na ca vinā tattvānyatvena lakṣyalakṣaṇasiddhau anyā gatir asti |

| My translation is in substantial agreement with Ruegg, but for stylistic uniformity I have decided to retranslate all the passages I quote. Although Ruegg occasionally translates *lakṣaṇa* as 'defining characteristic' – which captures both of the senses discussed below – in this instance, interestingly, he also retains the original Sanskrit. I believe this is justified when *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*, and their meaning, are in fact the topic under discussion. See David S. Ruegg, *Two prolegomena to Madhyamaka philosophy*, Wien: Universitat Wien, 2002, especially pages 111-112. For a different translation, see M. Sprung (tr.), *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way*, Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1979, page 56.

²⁰⁸ *evam prthivyādīnāṁ yadyapi kāṭhīnyādivyatiriktaṁ vicāryamāṇaṁ lakṣyaṁ nāsti lakṣyavyatirekeṇa ca lakṣaṇaṁ nirāśrayam tathāpi saṁvṛter eveti paraspārāpekṣayā tayor siddhyā siddhiṁ vyavasthāpayāṁ babhūvur ācāryāḥ | avāśyaṁ caitad evaṁ abhyupeyāṁ | anyathā hi saṁvṛtir upapattī nā viyujyate tad eva tattvam eva syān na saṁvṛtiḥ ||*

This passage is (like the preceding one) an answer to the *Sautrāntika* claim that *lakṣaṇa* is no other than the *lakṣya*. As we have seen in Chapter 2, this position is attested even in the *Kośa* and might well predate Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's more technical usages of the term *svalakṣaṇa*. Candrakīrti discards the option of identity just as much as he discards the ultimate difference between *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*. In this perspective, both the *Sautrāntika* position and the *Vaibhāṣika* become unacceptable (since the latter would accept at least some *lakṣaṇas* as ultimately existent and distinguishable from their *lakṣyas*). The position that both *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* are existent is conventionally, but only conventionally, sound: as the following passage makes clear:

If it is worldly usage, then necessarily, just like the *lakṣaṇa*, the *lakṣya* should be there. Therefore, this only is the defect. Or (should the twofold characteristic be accepted) as ultimate truth? Then, as the *lakṣya* is not there, the twofold *lakṣaṇa* is also not there.²⁰⁹

On the other hand, this passage does not engage in any analysis in terms of ultimate identity or difference. This is what Candrakīrti means when stating that *Mādhyamikas* resemble common persons: at least, this reading does not clash with other statements, where a *Madhyamaka* does not resemble a common person, in other respects.

The reasons for Candrakīrti's critique involve his specific perspective on Sanskrit grammar, with particular reference to the *kāraka* system, through

I will quote the same passage once again in a later discussion, where it will be linked specifically to the question of the status of Abhidharma. In this case, I have translated *tattva* as 'reality' for stylistic ease, to avoid the slightly awkward 'thatness'. Nevertheless, I am in agreement with those who may find this translation disputable.

²⁰⁹ [...] *yadi laukiko vyavahāraḥ tadā avaśyaṃ lakṣaṇaṃ lakṣyeṇāpi bhavitavyam | tataś ca sa eva doṣaḥ | atha paramārthaḥ | tadā lakṣyābhāvāt lakṣaṇadvayam api nāsti [...]*

which the two terms *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* can be analysed. About that aspect of the argument, I am devoting a section below.

In brief, Candrakīrti criticises that anything (in this case, *lakṣaṇa*) could be established independently from other conditions. To be independently established would mean that the thing is not empty. What is not empty would not fit within conventions (since it would be an ultimate) and would not fit as an ultimate truth either (since ultimate truth is not an established entity in *Madhyamaka*).

3.2.2 Applying the dialectic to a specific instance: the four conditions (*pratyayas*)

We have seen that *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* being mutually dependent entails that i) they are ultimately un-established and ii) they constitute sensible conventions. The application of these two ideas to a specific Abhidharmic instance is found in the commentary on the verses refuting the four *pratyayas*. The four *pratyayas* are categories through which *Abhidharma* describes causality through time (in particular, mental causality, as the *ālambanapratyaya* can only refer to mental instances). Candrakīrti also tells us that *hetus* (causes) are subsumed within the four *pratyayas*, thus they are not taken up separately.²¹⁰

The application of the dialectic of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* to the four *pratyayas* (besides fulfilling the role of explaining the adjective *anutpannam* in the

²¹⁰ *ye cānye purojātasahajātapaścājjātādayaḥ te eteṣv evāntarbhūtāḥ ||*

This statement does not support Garfield's exegesis. Garfield proposes that Nāgārjuna would accept *pratyayas* and not *hetus*. The basic problem with this interpretation is that the two sets are overlapping: all the six *hetus* are contained in the four *pratyayas*. The four *pratyayas* constitute a more comprehensive whole, wherein the six *hetus* can be subsumed, while the opposite is not true. In other words, the mention of the *pratyayas* alone is sufficient to cover all of the *pratyayas* and the *hetus*.

opening verse – according to Candrakīrti²¹¹) is complementary to the one found in the *Lokātīta*: the latter takes up dependent origination in the a-temporal sense of dependent imputation, in reference to the five *skandhas*. The analysis of the *skandhas* as presented in the *Lokātīta*, in other words, does not entail the analysis of causal relations through time, and hence does not rest on consideration of temporal priority or succession. The analysis of the *pratyayas*, on the other hand, takes up the issue of the relation between chronologically successive causes and effects.

Pratyayas and *hetus* are conventionally acceptable Abhidharmic categories: they do not rest on the type of ‘self’ or ‘what belongs to a self’ (*ātman* or *ātmīya*), which is not even conventionally accepted. Yet, under ultimate analysis, they cannot be individuated through their proposed *lakṣaṇas* (which Nāgārjuna renders in his verses).

Candrakīrti introduces the refutation of the four *pratyayas* through a hypothetical objection: conditions (refuted in the previous verses only in a generic manner) must exist, since their definitions have been taught. To answer this, Nāgārjuna is going to refute the definitions of the *pratyayas*.

That this is the purpose of the refutations can also be evinced by some of Candrakīrti’s other comments. For instance, he sums up the arguments against *nirvartako hetuḥ* as:

Therefore, what had been said - ‘due to the occurrence of its definition there is a *hetu-pratyaya*’ - things being in this way, this is not fit.²¹²

²¹¹ *idānīm anirodhādiviśiṣṭapratītyasamutpādapratipādayiṣayā utpādapratīṣedhena nirodhādipratīṣedhasaukāryaṃ manyamāna ācāryaḥ prathamam evotpādapratīṣedham ārabhate* || More specifically, Candrakīrti takes the refutation of the four *pratyayas* as refuting arising from something else.

²¹² *tataś ca yad uktam - lakṣaṇasambhavād vidyate hetupratyaya iti tad evaṃ sati na yujyate* ||

Candrakīrti emphasises how the commonly accepted definitions of the four *pratyayas* remain conventionally acceptable. Let us take the case of *ālambanapratyaya*:

How then is it that 'mind and mentations have supports'? That *lakṣaṇa* is conventional, not ultimate, thus there is no flaw.²¹³

For the *samanantara* and the *adhipati* too, Candrakīrti clarifies that Nāgārjuna is referring to their Abhidharmic definitions:

In this context, the succeeding cessation of the cause, which is the condition for the arising of the effect, is the *lakṣaṇa* of the immediately contiguous (*samanantaram*).²¹⁴

In this context 'x being there y occurs, x is y's dominant' is the *lakṣaṇa* of the dominant condition (*adhipatipratyaya*).²¹⁵

Candrakīrti points out that these are *lakṣaṇas* in three out of four instances of the very first set of refutations offered by Nāgārjuna. He also specifies how these refutations do not invalidate the *lakṣaṇas* of *Abhidharma* from a conventional standpoint: an important qualification that should be borne in mind when evaluating the relationship between Madhyamaka and Abhidharma. The latter should be distinguished from the relationship between Madhyamaka and other Indian philosophical schools: Candrakīrti states that non-Buddhist definitions, though, are to be discarded even conventionally as devoid of good reasoning.²¹⁶ All this implies that Abhidharmic definitions are refuted in a way that differs from the refutation of the non-Buddhist schools.

²¹³ *katham tarhi sālambanāś cittacaittāḥ | sūnīṣṭam eva tal lakṣaṇaṁ na pāramārthikam ity adōṣaḥ ||*

²¹⁴ *tatra kāraṇasyānantaro nirodhaḥ kāryasyotpādapratyayaḥ samanantaralakṣaṇam ||*

²¹⁵ *iha yasmin sati yad bhavati tat tasya ādhipateyam ity adhipatipratyayalakṣaṇam ||*

²¹⁶ *na hi tūthikaparikalpita yuktividhurāḥ padārthāḥ svasamaye 'bhyupagantuḥ nyāyāḥ [...]*

I do not think that this is a case of mere partisanship on the part of Candrakīrti. A permanent 'Self' is, from a *Madhyamaka* point of view, inexistent even conventionally. Non-Buddhist schools frame systems of definitions revolving around a permanent and non-contingent Self, and hence those definitions are flawed even conventionally. For example, in the *Nyāya-vaiśeṣika*, intellect (*buddhi*) is understood as a quality of the Self (*ātman*). If such a Self is considered a case of mistaken conventions (*mithyāsamvṛti*), it follows that the *Nyāya-vaiśeṣika* definition of *buddhi* is not workable even conventionally. Abhidharmic definitions, on the other hand, do not revolve around a permanent Self, hence they are conventionally viable even for a *Mādhyamika*.

3.2.3 The example of space

The section that is found in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* under the title *dhātuparīkṣā* (examination of the elements) could well be called 'examination of the *lakṣaṇas*', and constitutes another important and explicit discussion of the status of *lakṣaṇas*.²¹⁷

Nāgārjuna takes up one of the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*) *dharma*s accepted as real by the *Vaibhāṣikas*, namely space, only to generalise his conclusion to the other elements (and in part to all things). The first reason to take up *ākāśa* is probably that its refutation was not automatically included in the previous chapter on the *skandhas*, since the aggregates do not include the two *asaṃskṛtadharma*s, namely *ākāśa* and *nirodha*. In this way, Nāgārjuna ensures a remarkable thoroughness in treating of the various *Vaibhāṣika dharma*s.

²¹⁷ Sprung entitled his translation of this chapter 'The Primal Elements or Character and Characteristic'. See M. Sprung (tr.), *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way*, Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1979, page 103.

The choice of *ākāśa* is significant, though, not only since it offers scope for an obvious image of emptiness which Nāgārjuna hints at, but also because it is permanent.²¹⁸ The analysis of *dharma*s in terms of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* can show their emptiness irrespective of chronological causality, this being a central feature of the wider sense of *pratītyasamutpāda* in *Madhyamaka* (where it is also a term for the co-dependence of constructs/concepts).

In case of the *Vaibhāṣikas*, dependent arising meant the instantiation of a-temporal *dharma*s into a present activity, due to the joint operation of a causal assemblage and the *lakṣaṇas* with their *anulakṣaṇas*: which means that dependent arising is a term for an operation through time. For the Sautrāntikas, instantiation in time is perfect synonym with existence, and dependent arising constitutes the ‘history’ of *dharma*s, their origin through time. Nāgārjuna shifts the emphasis towards conceptual dependence, which includes temporal occurrences without being limited by the latter.

Any translation that decides to render *lakṣaṇa* as *either* definition or characteristic will fail to capture an essential ambiguity (or rather, richness) of the argument, which could be read as implying a close link between conceptual and linguistic determination (definition) and ontological identification (characteristic).²¹⁹ Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, speak in terms of succession (does the *lakṣaṇa* come before the thing it refers to, or *vice-versa*?), which may be taken as chronological or logical. Succession through time occurs only in the present attempt to determine *lakṣyas* and *lakṣaṇas*, to which the reader might assent; while priority, in this argument, is fundamentally of a logical kind. The

²¹⁸ A whole study has been dedicated to this issue. See Nancy McCagney, *Nāgārjuna and the philosophy of openness*, Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1997.

²¹⁹ For example, Sprung opts for ‘characteristic’: but see note 7. Sprung also noted that ‘The problem is both logical and ontological.’ See M. Sprung (tr.), *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way*, Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1979, page 103 note 1.

reference to chronological succession is therefore, at once, literal and metaphorical.

The other important features of Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's discussions in this section are no different from what we found either in the *Lokāṭīta* or in the first Chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Again, the short chapter exploits the dialectic of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*, taking *ākāśa* as an example, which is no more than a variable to be generalised.²²⁰ The tenor of the concluding verse of the chapter suggest its relevance, as here Nāgārjuna explicitly mentions the epistemic/soteriological goals of his endeavour and implies therefore that the route of deconstructing *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* is a privileged path towards comprehending emptiness.²²¹ Compared to other types of analysis, it applies to all instances, whether analysis through time is at stake or not. All other analyses can also be traced back to an analysis in terms of *lakṣaṇas*, because the starting point to be examined will unavoidable be a specific manner to understand a certain term; in other words, the *lakṣaṇa* of some *lakṣya*.

Thus: *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* are (ii) necessarily valid as conventions, but (i) ultimately un-established. Point (iii), namely, that only certain types of *lakṣaṇas* retain conventional validity, while others are unacceptable at any level, is what I intend to elaborate upon in the remaining portions of this chapter.

²²⁰ Minimally, it should be generalised to the other five *dhātus*: *ākāśasamā dhātavaḥ pañca ye pare || 7 ||*

²²¹ *astitvaṃ ye tu paśyanti nāstitvaṃ cālpabuddhayaḥ | bhāvānāṃ te na paśyanti draṣṭavyopāśamaṃ śivam || 8 ||*

3.3 Candrakīrti and the *Vaibhāṣika-Sautrāntika* divide: instants and the emptiness of *lakṣaṇas*

I have hinted at the continuity between Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's stance on *lakṣaṇas* and the debate between *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika* discussed in Chapter 2. One could yet ask: where does Candrakīrti fit in this Abhidharmic divide?

Sautrāntikas were still close to the *Vaibhāṣikas*, as they derived their basic framework from the latter. Many of the disputes between the two schools revolved around *Sautrāntika* proposals to reduce certain *dharma*s from the status of *dravyasat* (existing as ultimates) to that of *prajñaptisat* (existing by way of an imputation). As pointed out by Duerlinger,²²² this distinction does not mean that the *prajñaptisat dharma*s are utterly non-existent: it means, though, that they are further reducible under analysis. In other words, some of the *dharma*s accepted by the *Vaibhāṣikas* should be understood to be names for wholes or for functions, which are real, although not in the sense that ultimate, part-less atoms are.

In this sense, *Mādhyamikas* are in principle outside of such Abhidharmic debates: since none of the *dharma*s are, from their point of view, ultimate. The different models might be accepted as analytical devices or explanatory frameworks within conventional truth, but the debate cannot be about which

²²² J. Duerlinger, *Indian Buddhist Theories of Persons*, London: Routledge Courzon, 2003. See page 30, and especially note 88. I think, though, that Duerlinger excessively downplays the ontological disparity between being *prajñaptisat* versus *dravyasat*, a distinction, which carries significant weight even in *Abhidharma*. In one sense, I do not think that he is accurate to assert that the sense of *prajñaptisat* is utterly different in *Madhyamaka*. In fact, it means the same as in earlier *Abhidharma*: existence by way of a conception, *depending upon something else*. The difference, it seems to me, is about what this *something else* might be. From *Vaibhāṣika* or *Sautrāntika* point of views, it will have to be a collection of *dravyasat dharma*s; for the *Madhyamaka*, it will be some other *prajñapti*. Being *prajñapti* works therefore in the same manner, but the basis for a *prajñapti* to occur is understood differently.

ones are *dravyasat*, since none are. Within certain broad parameters, it is therefore expectable that *Mādhyamikas* may be flexible in matters of Abhidharmic conventions.

This is true of *Madhyamaka* as a whole, where different thinkers have approached conventions in different ways. I read Candrakīrti as a rather flexible *Mādhyamika* exponent. And for reasons, which follow from such flexibility, I believe that Candrakīrti was in some ways closer to the *Vaibhāṣika*: he rejects both specific *Sautrāntika* doctrines, as well as their proposed understanding of *lakṣaṇas*.

Candrakīrti's analysis of momentariness corroborates this interpretation. Impermanence, and its extreme doctrinal formulation in terms of *dharma*s being momentary, can play a role in reasoning towards lack of *svabhāva*: what is radically impermanent has no fixed nature, and things being radically impermanent, they are empty of *svabhāva*.²²³ Moreover, *kṣaṇikatva* is essential in understanding the continuity of consciousness in the sense of the doctrine of *karman* - therefore valid conventions. The other longer discussion of graded conventions I will refer to (that of Prajñākaramati's commentary on the *Bodhicaryāvatara*) is sparked by trying to find a proper place for *kṣaṇikatva*. At any rate, all *Mādhyamikas*, and Candrakīrti among them, appear to accept this doctrine as a valid conventional truth. Momentariness, though, can be understood in at least two rather different manners, which I have discussed in Chapter 2, whether we follow a *Vaibhāṣika* or a *Sautrāntika* approach. Some of Candrakīrti's references to momentariness as an analytical tool towards emptiness do not rest on a specifically *Vaibhāṣika* or *Sautrāntika* view. On the

²²³ Mūlamadhyamakakārikā 15.8: adyastitvaṃ prakṛtyā syān na bhaved asya nāstitā | prakṛter anyathābhāvo na hi jātūpadyate ||

other hand, he does seem to reject the *Sautrāntika* scheme, in one or possibly two occasions.

3.3.1 *Madhyamaka* versus the *lakṣaṇas* of all compounded factors

The 7th Chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* is dedicated to the analysis of those *lakṣaṇas* that occasioned the first debate I discussed in Chapter 2, i.e. the *lakṣaṇas* of all compounded factors (*saṃskṛta*). This is one of the sections of Nāgārjuna's work where it is clear that he started from an Abhidharmic framework close to the *Vaibhāṣika*. These categories are refuted, though, and so are the *upalakṣaṇas*, which the *Vaibhāṣikas* considered necessary to ensure that the *lakṣaṇas* themselves are *saṃskṛta*, compounded. Candrakīrti offers a different rationale to establish the dependent arising of *lakṣaṇa* – one, which is available only to the *Mādhyamikas*, in their unique understanding of *pratītyasamutpāda* as dependent imputation. He then passes on to distance himself from the other alternative – the *Sautrāntika* view. This section testifies once more for the interconnectedness of dependent arising, the *lakṣaṇas*, and a view of momentariness.

The main objection that Candrakīrti has to face is that, if one does not accept the *anulakṣaṇa* called cessation of cessation (*nirodhanirodha*, the same as *vināśavināśa*), then *nirodha* itself would not exist, since it would lose the quality of being *saṃskṛta* (and of course it would be difficult to take a functional dharma as *asaṃskṛta*). Candrakīrti replies that this is the case only for the opponent, but that this consequence does not follow for the *Mādhyamika*. In ultimate analysis, the latter would accept that there is neither *nirodha* nor *utpāda* (in fact, that is how the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* begins). On the other hand, the *Mādhyamika* can stay within the conventions of those 'whose mind's

eyes are blinded by ignorance' (*avidyātimiropahatamatīnayanāḥ*) and accept that

[...] 'when there is arising, there is something to arise, when there is something to arise, there is arising. When there is cessation, there is something to cease, when there is something to cease, there is cessation': since we accept such worldly usages, how could the same consequences follow for our side?²²⁴

Since 'arising' is in this chapter the name for a *lakṣaṇa*, and since the same is true for 'cessation', it follows that 'something to arise' and 'something to cease' (*utpādya* and *nirodhya*) are *lakṣyas*: and Candrakīrti's argument is once more based on the dialectic between *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*. Both of them can be considered dependently originated, since they are mutually imputed. The argument could hence be rephrased as 'when there is a *lakṣaṇa*, there is *lakṣya*, when there is *lakṣya*, there is *lakṣaṇa*', and so on.

I think that the echoes of the discussion in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* are clear enough for Candrakīrti's contemporary readers to understand this as a reference: perhaps even as a clarification of where he stands in regards to the status of *lakṣaṇas* as a whole, considering that the section of the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* was especially devoted to this issue (as I highlighted in Chapter 2).

3.3.2 Does disappearance exist?

Although the *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas* are refuted, at least in the sense of not being ultimate, the alternative *Sautrāntika* position of universal momentariness (where only one *kṣaṇa* is accepted) is heavily criticised by Candrakīrti. To be more precise, his criticism takes up Vasubandhu's own doctrine that disappearance

²²⁴ *sati utpāde utpādyam sati utpādye utpādaḥ | sati nirodhe nirodhyaṃ sati nirodhye nirodhaḥ ity evaṃ laukikasya vyavahārasyābhyupagamāt kuto 'smatpakṣe samaprasaṅgitā bhavitum arhati || Prasannapadā, 7.32.*

(*vināśa*) is uncaused, since it is an absence (one of Vasubandhu's main arguments in favour of momentariness, often reproduced by later *Pramāṇavāda* type treatises).²²⁵

Candrakīrti's argument is made of two parts: first, he attacks the idea that disappearance may be uncaused, since otherwise it would be even conventionally non-existent, like a sky-flower (*khapuṣpavat*). It would then follow that things are not momentary, and also that they would lose the quality of being compounded (*saṃskṛtatvam*), since they would be devoid of disappearance. The argument centres on the premise that, whatever is not caused is utterly non-existent and cannot be functional. Candrakīrti also specifies that *kṣaṇabhaṅga* (instantaneous destruction) can be accepted in reference to mere *jāti* (birth, same as *utpāda*), and therefore the claim that momentariness needs to be proven by declaring cessation uncaused is counteracted. The expression he uses (*jātimātrāpekṣatvāt*), though, is ambiguous, and could either mean that *kṣaṇabhaṅga* refers only to the *kṣaṇa* of *jāti*, or that things only need *jāti* and then cease – thus bringing Candrakīrti's position, in fact, closer to the *Sautrāntika*. The fact that in the passage quoted on the previous page, Candrakīrti refers only to *utpāda* and *nirodha*, raises the question of how many instants he would conventionally accept, to which I will return shortly.

In the second part of the argument against Vasubandhu, Candrakīrti's conclusion might appear rather startling, as he declares that cessation (*vināśa*) has a nature of its own (*svarūpa*) and that this nature is to be understood as existence (*bhāva*). This conclusion was in effect flung from the opponent, as an

²²⁵ See *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam* on *Abhidharmakośa* 4.2 and 4.3ab. The similarity between the position expressed therein and what Candrakīrti criticises is striking, although they could come from a common source. For a similar argument in a *Pramāṇavāda* text, see for example *Tattvasaṃgraha* 355, with Kamalaśīla's comments.

unwanted consequence following the acceptance that cessation is caused. Candrakīrti had answered that the cause does not produce an effect (*kriyāmaṇam kimcit*), it just causes cessation to take place. If this implies that cessation is an ‘existence’ (*bhāva*), that does not seem to bother Candrakīrti at all (‘we indeed accept this’ *iṣyate evaitat*):

Since, disappearance is existence in reference to its own nature (*svarūpa*), but from the point of view of its having the essence (*svabhāva*) of the removal of *dharma*s like form, etc., it is not existence.²²⁶

Is Candrakīrti saying that disappearance exists, but as something else’s non-existence? Conventionally, perhaps he is. The terminology employed by Candrakīrti is puzzling, as he seems to distinguish *svarūpa* from *svabhāva*, and he also appears to accept both – at least as conventions (something, which many in the Tibetan tradition have long taken as the distinctive trait of other *Mādhyamikas*, but which would distinguish Candrakīrti for its absence).²²⁷ Nonetheless, this argument is more comprehensible if we take Candrakīrti as saying that, conventionally, cessation exists, but that its effect is the non-existence of the *dharma*s to which it applies. If this is indeed a plausible reason, the distinction drawn is analogous to the *Vaibhāṣika*’s differentiation between *svabhāva* and *kāritra* (see Chapter 2.1.1). The fact that Candrakīrti may employ this distinction, even though conventionally, suggests that at least some *Mādhyamikas* must have been quite aware of what Williams points out – that they used *svabhāva* in a different sense than the *Vaibhāṣikas* (since sometimes they seem to use it in the same sense).²²⁸ Even if we allow for significant

²²⁶ *vināśo hi svarūpāpekṣayā bhāvaḥ rūpādīdharmanivṛttisvabhāvatvāt tu na bhāvaḥ | Prasannapadā, 7.32.*

²²⁷ See Georges B.J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (eds.), *The Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction*, Boston: Wisdom, 2003. See also: Robert Thurman (tr.), *The Speech of Gold*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1989: this is a translation of tTsongkhapa’s main work on the distinguishing traits of *Prāsaṅgika* versus other systems.

²²⁸ Paul Williams, ‘On The Abhidharma Ontology’, in *Journal of Indian Philosophy*, 9 (1981), pages 227-257.

differences in Candrakīrti's usage, it is still the case that the types of distinctions he draws are closer to *Vaibhāṣika*, and are aimed specifically at refuting a *Sautrāntika* inspired reform regarding the *kṣaṇa*.

3.3.3 Candrakīrti and momentariness

In another section, Candrakīrti refutes, rather vehemently, the *Sautrāntika*'s idea that the four *lakṣaṇas* may be referring to one *kṣaṇa*, and hence to something which ceases right after arising:

Just like you do not accept the momentariness of a shape and its reflection, a seal and its imprint and so on, in the same way for other things too, destroyed immediately after arising, momentariness is not fit. Since the reading in the *Abhidharma* says: the four *lakṣaṇas* of the compounded, namely birth, decay, abiding and impermanence, exist in just one instant of something which is arising, whether external or internal. In that context, because of the reciprocal incompatibility of birth and decay, as also of abiding and impermanence, their simultaneous occurrence in one thing is not accepted by the wise.²²⁹

The difficulty in interpreting the passage is that it is not immediately clear whether Candrakīrti is refuting the *Sautrāntika* theory as ultimately untenable, or whether he intends to show how, even conventionally, it is not sensible. I would favour the second reading, since a different argument is given by

²²⁹ *yathā bimbapratibimbamudrāpratimudrādinyāyena kṣaṇikatvaṃ neṣyate bhavadbhiḥ tathā anyasyāpi bhāvasya utpādasamanantaradhvaṃsinaḥ kṣaṇikatvaṃ na yuktam | yataḥ jātījarāsthityanīyatākhyāni catvāri saṃskṛtalakṣaṇāni utpādyamānasya bāhyasya ādhyātmikasya vā ekasminn eva kṣaṇe bhavantiḥ abhidharmapāṭhaḥ | tatra jātījarayorḥ parasparavirodhāt sthityanīyatayoḥ ca ekasminn eva bhāve na yugapat sambhava iṣyate sadbhiḥ || Prasannapadā on 26.2.*

I think that *abhidharmapāṭhāt* must here refer to either Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya*, or to some specifically *Sautrāntika*-inspired *Abhidharma*: since the position described would not necessarily fit the standard *Vaibhāṣika* view

Candrakīrti when demonstrating the *Mādhyamikas'* non-acceptance of momentariness as ultimate:

[...] thus, according to what we read in the *Madhyamaka* system, one should accept (its) non-establishment, because of the non-establishment of a momentary word-referent.²³⁰

According to the *Madhyamaka* system, no *dharmas* (here, word-referents) can be ultimately said to exist. Without *dharmas*, it becomes impossible to speak of their momentariness.

If this is to be taken as Candrakīrti's rationale to discard momentariness as ultimate, and if the other argument is to disprove the *Sautrāntika* position even conventionally, it follows that the *Vaibhāṣika's* view has not been conventionally refuted.

3.3.4 Candrakīrti's conventions: *Vaibhāṣika* or *Sautrāntika*?

Vaibhāṣika was, in one sense, a synonym of mainstream *Abhidharma*. The very fact that *Sautrāntika* can be understood as a critique of the former views suggest that *Sautrāntikas* are, after all, no more than reformed *Vaibhāṣikas*. If this is true, then Candrakīrti is hinting that, in conventional matters, he is merely following mainstream *Abhidharmic* classifications, without subscribing to the *Sautrāntika* project of a revised list of ultimate *dharmas*: as I have already pointed out, a *Mādhyamika* could not participate in such project, a priori.

Bhāvaviveka, though, is known as having widely favoured *Sautrāntika* doctrinal schemes, and it is perhaps to distance oneself from this attitude that Candrakīrti

²³⁰ [...] *iti madhyamakāsiddhāntapāṭhāt kṣaṇikapadārthāsiddher asiddhir avaseyā* | *Ibidem*.

makes it rather clear that he is not endorsing specific *Sautrāntika Abhidharma*, even conventionally.

I would also argue for the relative closeness of *Madhyamaka* and *Vaibhāṣika*, which can be evinced from several sets of considerations. First, Nāgārjuna consistently analyses Abhidharmic positions, which appear closer to *Vaibhāṣika* than *Sautrāntika*: this suggests that the latter view was not his starting point. But more compelling doctrinal reasons make *Sautrāntika* analysis less viable as a template for *Madhyamaka* conventions (especially in Candrakīrti's *Madhyamaka*). These have to do with the status of *lakṣaṇas*, the topic of the long discussions between *Vaibhāṣika* and *Sautrāntika*, reconstructed in Chapter 2. They also have to do with a different understanding of the role of diachronic analysis within dependent origination; and once again, with grammar.

Sautrāntikas, as we have seen, argued for the identification of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*, a move which runs against the grain of Candrakīrti's (and Nāgārjuna's) insistence on their mutual dependence. In the instance that occasioned the debate reported in Chapter 2, *Vaibhāṣikas* are rebuked for upholding the factual difference between *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*, in reference to the *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas*. This position, too, is one that both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti would discard. So far, thus, we have an equal distance from both *Sautrāntikas* and *Vaibhāṣikas*: but I believe that in other cases, the *Vaibhāṣikas*' avoidance of analysis would be more in line with *Madhyamaka*.

This is borne out by certain lines of argument used in the *Sautrāntika* objections. The *Vaibhāṣikas* are reminded of a series of instances where they themselves do not posit a *lakṣaṇa* apart from the *lakṣya*. I have discussed these examples and their relative weight in Chapter 2: the example of the *lakṣaṇa* of cow, the *lakṣaṇa* of earth, and so on. In all this cases, *Sautrāntikas* would argue that

lakṣaṇa and *lakṣya* are patently the same, since they cannot be established as different. They would also argue that the *Vaibhāṣikas* must accept as much, and that therefore their stance on the *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas* contradicts a more general perspective on *lakṣaṇas*.

The last point is here important. What *Sautrāntikas* remark is that the *Vaibhāṣikas* accept the identity of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇas* despite themselves, meaning, not out of self-conscious theorisation, but because of the actual impossibility of establishing the pair as different. This implies, though, that *Vaibhāṣikas* had not analysed general cases of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* as either identical or different: and this is precisely what Candrakīrti upholds to be a correct attitude towards their conventional occurrence. In this sense, the *Sautrāntika* system presents an over-analysis of conventions, which the *Vaibhāṣikas* have generally not committed to – except in the specific instance of the *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas* (which is in fact taken up for discussion in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*).

The discussion on the *saṃskṛtalakṣaṇas* is also linked to a different understanding of dependent origination and its workings through time. As pointed out in Chapter 2, *Sautrāntikas* were strict in understanding *pratītyasamutpāda* as the diachronic causal link between *dharma*s that last no more than one moment. For the *Vaibhāṣikas*, *dharma*s exist in the three times and *pratītyasamutpāda* is the instantiation in the present of their activity (*kāritra*): causality can even function simultaneously – as in the case of *sahabhū hetuḥ*.

Even in the case of explicit discussions of causality, Candrakīrti, as we have seen, appears to accept the possibility of simultaneity – as he accepts *sahabhū hetuḥ*. There is also a more fundamental sense, in which *pratītyasamutpāda* as

the strictly diachronic casual succession of momentary *dharma*s, does not square well with *Madhyamaka* interpretations of the same.

Mādhyamikas, starting from Nāgārjuna, speak of being dependently originated also in the sense of being dependently imputed. This is in the same logical sense in which *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* are analysed, or in the same sense in which long depends from short and *viceversa* (an example used even by Nāgārjuna).²³¹ This sense of *pratītyasamutpāda* is obviously not referable to succession through time in the *Sautrāntika* sense: and at least in terms of its structure, the *Vaibhāṣika* tenet of a-temporal *dharma*s is closer to a-temporal analysis in terms of reciprocally dependent *prajñaptis*. It is not impossible to go from a strictly diachronic understanding of momentary dependent origination to an analysis of *dharma*s as empty: Śāntarakṣita's and Kamalaśīla's tradition of *Madhyamaka* is a good example. Yet, this does not seem to be the route taken by Candrakīrti (nor, arguably, by Nāgārjuna).

The discussion on *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* in the *Prasannapadā* is intertwined with Candrakīrti's clearest assertions about the regulating role of the *kāraṇa* system, as shown above. This is also a point where the *Sautrāntika* proposal of doing away with one of the *kāraṇas* (*karṭṛ*) is in direct opposition to Candrakīrti's stance – who, I believe, would sympathise with the *Vaibhāṣikas*' retention of this category at all levels of analysis. In Chapter 5, I will show that in fact, the opposite is true for *Yogācāra*, which reproduce the *Sautrāntika* attitude towards *karṭṛ*.²³²

As I argued in Chapters 1 and 2, *vyākaraṇa* and *Abhidharma* are well understood as two sets of *lakṣaṇas*, whose operation within the complex fold of

²³¹ *astitve sati nāstitvaṃ dīrghaḥ hrasvaḥ tathā sati || Acintyastava*, 13a.

²³² Asaṅga's *Paramārthagāthā* is probably one of the oldest examples of the *Yogācāra* attitude towards *karṭṛ*, which, as I have mentioned, resembles the *Sautrāntikas*'.

Buddhist philosophy varies but constantly recurs. I have provided in this section several instances where Candrakīrti discusses the very status of these *lakṣaṇas*, or where the results of his discussion constitute the necessary background for a specific refutation. All this occurs in very important sections of the *Prasannapadā*, giving credibility to my contention that the analysis of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* is central to *Madhyamaka* thought.

The next Chapter will turn to the related question of where *Mādhyamikas* may place these complex analyses of conventions. If *Mādhyamikas* accept ‘as much as common people do’, where to fit the refined *lakṣaṇas* of *Abhidharma* and *vyākaraṇa*?

Chapter 4

Conventions, the world, and *Madhyamaka*

It is in this way, Avalokiteśvara: this dependent arising is the *dharmakāya* of the Tathāgatas.²³³

It has been common to subdivide *Mādhyamikas* into *Prāsaṅgika* and *Svātantrika*. This nomenclature is derived from a discussion found in the first chapter of Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*. It owes its currency primarily to the Tibetan doxographical tradition, and is therefore only retrospectively applicable to the Indian sources. A recent publication has been devoted to a better understanding of the categories of *Prāsaṅgika* and *Svātantrika*: the net result being a cautionary note about their employment.²³⁴

In the context of this debate, the following analysis will provide a perspective that, to my knowledge, runs contrary to a widespread view about *Prāsaṅgikas*. I read certain philosophers (namely Candrakīrti, Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati) as allowing for a system of graded conventions: a feature, not usually associated with them, as much as with the philosophers grouped as *Svātantrikas*.

In particular, this bears upon their relationship to two complex systems of conventional analysis: *vyākaraṇa* and *Abhidharma*, the focus of Chapters 1 and 2. Looking at *Madhyamaka* discussions against the wider background

²³³ *yadidaṃ avalokiteśvara ayaṃ pratītyasamutpādas tathāgatānāṃ dharmakāyaḥ ||*
Āryapratītyasamutpādo nāma mādhyānasūtra

²³⁴ Georges J.B. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (eds.), *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction*, Boston: Wisdom, 2003. The introduction places the problem within the historiography of Indian Buddhism.

delineated in the previous sections of this thesis may give a more nuanced, and hopefully precise reading of their implications. It will also be understood that the philosophers' stand on *lakṣaṇas* (as discussed in Chapter 3) is the basis for their specific perspective on conventional descriptions.

Bhāvaviveka and his successors have been defined as *Sautrāntika-mādhyamikas* for their ample use of *Sautrāntika* categories. Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla and so on would be *Yogācāra-mādhyamikas*, since they merge *Madhyamaka* with a conventional acceptance of *Yogācāra*, as an intermediate step towards the comprehension of ultimate emptiness. In the case of *Svātantrikas*, scholars seem to agree as to their employment of a complex, and plausibly graded, system of conventional truths.²³⁵

Prāsaṅgikas have been described as accepting only 'as much as common people would' – thus eschewing any possibility of graded conventions.²³⁶ The system of conventions employed by Candrakīrti (or, by extension, Śāntideva), might thus be understood as non-gradual, contrasting emptiness, a truth in the ultimate

²³⁵ See for example J. Hirabashi and S. Iida, 'Another Look at the Mādhyamika vs. Yogācāra Controversy Concerning Existence and Non-Existence', in L. Lancaster (ed.) *Prajñāpāramitā and Related Systems*, Berkeley: University of California, 1977, pages 341-360. Here the position just described is maintained in a rather extreme form.

²³⁶ An alternative classification is available in the Tibetan tradition, where one class of *Mādhyamikas* are described as "Jig rten grags sde pa (the school [that relies on] what is known in the world)": Georges J.B Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (eds.), *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction*, Boston: Wisdom, 2003, page 21.

This may only partly overlap with the *Prāsaṅgikas*, but it is indeed the most important feature for my discussion, and it is interesting that it could give rise to a separate doxographical category. Candrakīrti explicitly endorses this position (accepting as much as the *loka*), but the meaning of his statements is complex and will be discussed in some detail below.

Also, among Indian authors Advayaavajra's main distinction is not between *Svātantrika* and *Prāsaṅgika*, but between *Māyopamādvayavāda* and *Sarvadharmāpratiṣṭhānavāda*. Some Tibetan commentators identify the two types of distinctions, but this may be again retrospective. See Klaus-Dieter Mathes, 'Can *sūtra mahāmudrā* be justified on the basis of Maitrīpa's *Apratiṣṭhānavāda*?' in Brigit Kellner et.al. (eds.), *Pramāṇakīrtiḥ. Papers Dedicated to Ernst Steinkellner on the Occasion of his 70th Birthday, Part 2*, Wien: Universitat Wien, 2007. See also the *Advayaavajrasaṃgraha*, *Tattvaratnāvalī*, 19-20.

sense (*paramārthasatya*) against a conventional acceptance of what even ‘cowherds’ would accept.

I wish to argue for a variant reading of Candrakīrti and Śāntideva (through Prajñākaramati): hence, my analysis only regards those philosophers so far classified as *Prāsaṅgikas*, who seem to accept as much as the ‘world’ does. Although, as pointed out by Eckel, this feature is not necessarily absent in some philosophers classified as *Svātantrika* (like Jñānagarbha²³⁷), it is prominent in Candrakīrti and Śāntideva, who may provide the possible strongest case against my reading.

4.1 *Samvṛti* and *Paramārtha*: Candrakīrti and Prajñākaramati

The words ‘convention’ and ‘conventional’, have been employed to render the Sanskrit *samvṛti*, and also frequently for its partial synonym *vyavāhara*. Such terms normally occur (not only in Buddhist texts) in conjunction with *satya*, referring to a conventional truth (*samvṛtisatya*), to be contrasted to what is true in the ultimate sense (*paramārthasatya*). Thus we have the well-known Buddhist system of two truths, conventional and ultimate. Differences between Buddhist schools can be understood in terms of how they explain the two truths and their reciprocal relation.

The Sanskrit terms represented by ‘conventional’ and ‘ultimate’ have a range of meanings not to be captured by any single English word, as each meaning plays upon a different etymological possibility. The choice of ‘conventional’, while sensible and justified, neglects some of the primary concerns of the original

²³⁷ See M.D. Eckel, ‘The Satisfaction of No Analysis’, in Georges J.B Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (eds.), *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction*, Boston: Wisdom, 2003, pages 173-203.

sources. The recurrent element in the different etymologies of *saṃvṛti* is the idea of concealing, not so much the concept of relativity.²³⁸

Even I-Tsing (in the 7th century C.E.) noticed how older Chinese translations of *saṃvṛti* failed to reproduce the sense of ‘concealment’, and argued for the importance of the latter meaning. I am in substantial agreement with his remarks, which show a remarkable sensitivity to Sanskrit language and to the problems of translating certain key terms.²³⁹

Candrakīrti offers a rather detailed exegesis of the sense of *saṃvṛti* while commenting upon *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.8. In that verse, Nāgārjuna

²³⁸ Conspicuously absent is any discussion of historical or cultural determination in a modern sense, which resonates through most contemporary depictions of relativity. This point is more important than what it might initially appear. There is a tendency, occasionally between the lines, to equate historical change with impermanence in the Buddhist sense, thus ending up charging Buddhist traditional scholars with some form of essentialist prejudice about history, running counter to the very doctrines they wish to purport. This can be seen, for example, in Gombrich’s project to apply the Buddhist’s own idea of ‘conditioned genesis’ to the very history of Buddhism, or, more recently, in Huntington’s attacks on the essentialising doxographical trends of practically every Buddhist thinker except Candrakīrti (and maybe two others?). I believe this type of criticism to be simplistic: it takes into no account that Buddhists can and do speak of histories, although their perspective about historical reconstruction is significantly different from what Gombrich or Huntington favour. I have unfortunately no space to elaborate this rather important issue any further, but I hope that its relevance on the interpretation of *saṃvṛti* may be comprehensible.

See R.F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began. The conditioned genesis of the early teachings*. Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1997 and C.W.Jr. Huntington, ‘Was Candrakīrti a Prāsaṅgika?’ in: Georges J.B Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (eds.), *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction*, Boston: Wisdom, 2003.

²³⁹ ‘Paramārtha-satya, the ‘highest truth’, and Saṃvṛti-satya, the ‘secondary or concealed truth’. The latter is interpreted by the old translators as the ‘worldly truth’, but this does not fully express the meaning of the original. The meaning is that the ordinary matters conceal the real state, e.g. as to anything, such as a pitcher, there is earth only in reality, but people think that it is a pitcher from erroneous predication.’ [...] J. Takakusu, (tr.), *A Record of the Buddhist Religion, by I-Tsing*, Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1982, page 168. The passage continues with other perceptive remarks and I-Tsing’s own renderings for the two truths, which he analyses in terms of Sanskrit *saṃvṛti* terminology – despite their being Chinese phrases.

Nagao too has treated in some detail of the etymologies of *saṃvṛti* and its Chinese renderings. See: G.Nagao, *The Foundational Standpoint of Mādhyamika Philosophy*, Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, 1990, especially Chapters 3 and 4.

distinguishes between two truths, upon which rests the Buddha's teaching: *lokasamvṛtisatya* and *paramārthasatya*.

Candrakīrti gives some alternative meanings for *lokasamvṛti*. The word *loka* can itself have more than one sense. As given by the *Prasannapadā*, its first sense is the one of a person imputed in dependence upon the five aggregates (this seems to be its primary sense even according to Śāntideva). *Samvṛti* is then glossed as 'complete covering' (*samantād varaṇam*), a synonym of ignorance (*ajñānam*). What is true from the point of view of a person's ignorance of reality (*tattva*), is thus *lokasamvṛtisatya*.

It is worth pointing out that here *loka* must necessarily refer to the 'common person' (*prthagjana*), in the technical sense of someone who has not entered the Path of Seeing: in other words, someone who is not yet a Noble One (*ārya*). Alternatively, it must be a Noble One engaging with *samvṛti*, not in meditative absorption on emptiness (see below for Prajñākaramati's position about a Noble One's engagement with *samvṛti*). What this means is that, the *loka* of the *lokasamvṛti* need not be an *entirely* unrefined person: in fact, even an *Abhidharma* author could fit this category, as long as he would not have entered the Path of Seeing, or even after that, when engaging in post-meditation. The same applies to a grammarian.

In Candrakīrti's second alternative, *samvṛti* is taken as 'arising in dependence upon each other'. This etymology justifies the English rendering as 'relative truth', and is closely connected to the idea (discussed earlier) that reciprocal dependence ensures conventional validity, although it entails ultimate emptiness. The last interpretation takes *samvṛti* in the sense of 'token', linguistic symbol: in other words, a convention. In this instance, *loka* should be taken to mean 'the world'. Although Candrakīrti does not explicate this, it appears

implicit in his gloss as ‘conventions in the world’ (*loke samvṛtiḥ*), which does not fit well with taking *loka* just as ‘person’.

Prajñākaramati, a late *Mādhyamika* commentator, broadly follows Candrakīrti in his explanation of *saṃvṛti*. He too, identifies it as a ‘covering’, pointing out how both *saṃvṛti* and *āvaraṇa* (obscuration) stem from the same verbal root. Commenting upon verse 9.2, which identifies *saṃvṛti* with intellection (*buddhi*), he brings the discussion on a rather complex epistemological point: is all intellection to be called *saṃvṛti*, or are there types of *buddhi* that could be understood as different from this obscuration to *tattva*?

Prajñākaramati’s is rather emphatic about *buddhi* being necessarily *saṃvṛti*. He draws a distinction between *buddhi* and *jñāna*, which I believe reproduces the common distinction between *viññāna* and *jñāna* to be found, for example, in the list of four reliances (as in, one should rely on *jñāna* and not on *viññāna*). Some technical aspects of Prajñākaramati’s argument support the conclusion that *buddhi* and *viññāna* are here taken to be synonyms.²⁴⁰

The definition of *viññāna* as ‘seeing an object’ (*arthadrṣṭi*) is quoted by Candrakīrti as acceptable. Although this definition is part of a *Yogācāra* treatise (it is in the first chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāṅga*), its thrust is in line with mainstream *Abhidharma*. The *Abhidharmakośa* defines *viññāna* as *prativijñaptiḥ*, which the *bhāṣya* glosses as:

cognition, or perception, towards such and such object is called the aggregate of consciousness.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ See Appendix 1, commentary to 9.2.

²⁴¹ *viṣayaṃ viṣayaṃ prati vijñaptir upalabdhir vijñānaskandha ity ucyate ||*
Abhidharmakośabhāṣya on 1.16a.

Yaśomitra further clarifies that perception (*upalabdhiḥ*) here means the apprehension of a mere object (*vastumātragrahaṇam*), which differentiates *viññāna* from the other formless aggregates, since the latter apprehend specificities (*vedanādayas tu caitasā viśeṣagrahaṇarūpāḥ*).

The common trait of these definitions of *viññāna* is that consciousness is understood as intentionality towards an object. In technical descriptions of the dependent arising of consciousness, this object is classified as the necessary support condition (*ālambanapratyaya*), without which consciousness will not come about.

Madhyamaka often depicts its practice as ‘the *yoga* of no perception’ (*anupalambhayoga*), and Śāntideva emphasises that a support is in fact a cause of bondage (*sālambanena cittena śhātavyam yatra tatra vā*, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 9.47). It would then follow that no *viññāna* or *buddhi* (taken as synonyms) may qualify as a proper cognition of emptiness, since *buddhi* arises only in dependence on a support. In Prajñākaramati’s terms:

In this way, *saṃvṛti* is the means to teach *paramārtha*, and the realisation of *paramārtha* is what is to be got through such means: since it cannot be taught otherwise. (Question:) Is it not then that such a thing also, the object of such an intellection (*buddhi*) is to be considered *paramārtha*? To this he says ‘*buddhi* is called *saṃvṛti*’. All *buddhi* indeed is *saṃvṛti*, since due to having a non-support as a support it has the nature of a misconstruction, and all misconstruction has indeed the nature of wrong knowledge, since it apprehends a non-thing. As it is said ‘misconstruction does itself take the form of wrong knowledge’. Wrong knowledge is *saṃvṛti*. Therefore, indeed no *buddhi* apprehending the form of *paramārtha* makes sense as *paramārtha*. Otherwise, being apprehensible by an obscured *buddhi*, its quality of being *paramārtha* would be lacking, since

paramārtha is in fact not the object of an obscured (or, conventional) *jñāna*.²⁴²

Prajñākaramati supports his argument by quoting the *Satyadvayāvatārasūtra* at some length: but the most important section of his commentary is perhaps where he describes *paramārtha*:

Thus, the Blessed One, whose inner self is illumined by the shining of *jñāna* pervading the expanse of infinite things, said the truth of *paramārtha* to be without the specificities of all conventional things, and devoid of any adjunct.²⁴³

The usage of words like ‘inner self’ or ‘devoid of adjuncts’ are to be understood within the context of Buddhist usages, and should not be confused with their homonyms in, for example, *Advaita Vedānta*: Prajñākaramati gives ample indications of having no sympathy for a view of ‘Self’. What is relevant, though, is the emphasis on *saṃvṛti* as a synonym of cognitive impediment and misconstruction, and the contrasting usage of *jñāna* as against *buddhi* to refer to a realisation of *paramārtha*.²⁴⁴ That this is similar to the distinction between *jñāna* and *viññāna* can be also evinced by comparing the section of the

²⁴² *evaṃ paramāṛthadeśanopāyabhūtā saṃvṛtiḥ paramāṛthādhigamaś ca upeyabhūta iti anyathā tasya deśayitum aśakyatvāt | nanu ca tathāvidham api tathāvidhabuddhiviśayaḥ paramāṛthataḥ kiṃ na bhavati | ityātrāha buddhiḥ saṃvṛtir ucyate iti | sarvā hi buddhiḥ ālambananirālambanatayā vikalpasvabhāvā vikalpaś ca sarva eva avidyāsvabhāvāḥ avastugrāhivāt | yad āha | vikalpaḥ svayam evāyam avidyārūpatāḥ gataḥ | iti | avidyā ca saṃvṛtiḥ iti naiva kācid buddhiḥ pāramāṛthikarūpagrāhiṇī paramāṛthato yujyate | anyathā saṃvṛtabuddhigrāhyatayā paramāṛtharūpatayaiva tasya hīyeta paramāṛthasya vastutaḥ saṃvṛtajñānāviśayatvāt || Commentary on Bodhicaryāvatāra 9.2.*

²⁴³ *iti pratyastamitasamastasāmvṛtavastuviśeṣam aśeṣopādhiviviktam uktam anantavastuvistaravyāpijñānālokāvabhāsītāntarātmanā bhagavatā paramāṛthasatyam iti || Ibidem.*

²⁴⁴ One more section of Prajñākaramati's commentary emphasises the mistaken nature of *saṃvṛti*: this is the explanation of 9.107 and 9.108, where the opponent asks how is there indeed any living being in *nirvāṇa*, as he should not have *saṃvṛti*. The answer is that, although it is true that all intellection is *saṃvṛti*, as it is of the nature of a mental construct, therefore liberation too is *saṃvṛti*, the latter is perceived only by others, not by the liberated being himself: [...] *tasyāpi buddhyā viśayikarāṇāt | buddhiś ca sarvaiva saṃvṛtiḥ kalpanāsvabhāvatvāt | buddhiḥ saṃvṛtir ucyate iti vacanāt nirvṛtir api saṃvṛtiḥ syāt || [...] parasya nirvṛtasattvād anyasya sattvasya cittāṇi tasyāsau vikalpaḥ yo'yaṃ nirvṛtasyāpi buddhyā viśayikarāṇam | na hi paracittavikalpena anyasya saṃvṛtir yuktā | tato'nyabuddhyā viśayikriyamāṇo'pi nirvṛta evāsau ||*

Laṅkāvatārasūtra (quoted in other contexts by Prajñākaramati) that elucidates their defining trait. One passage mentions that

(...) *jñāna* has the characteristic of non-attachment, while *viññāna* has the characteristic of attachment to the manifoldness of objects.²⁴⁵

The rest of the discussion resembles Prajñākaramati's own, by drawing similar distinctions.

If *saṃvṛti* is concealment and obscuration, though, the question arises as to whether any type of *saṃvṛti* is acceptable. The next sections will discuss this point.

4.2 Identity and difference between *Mādhyamikas* and cowherds:²⁴⁶

Abhidharma and *Vyākaraṇa*

I noticed how the *Svātantrika Mādhyamikas* have been read as including a system of graded conventions. The same cannot be said of *Prāsaṅgikas* (especially Candrakīrti), often understood as accepting, conventionally, only as much as 'common people' would.

Prāsaṅgikass 'qua *Prāsaṅgikas*'²⁴⁷ would have no reason or parameter to choose between alternative sets of equally functional conventions. Or, even

²⁴⁵ [...] *asaṅgalakṣaṇaṃ jñānaṃ viśayavaicitryasaṅgalakṣaṇaṃ viññānaṃ* || *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, 3.37. Compare also the *Suvikrāntavikrāmiparipṛcchāsūtra*: *aviśayo hi jñānaṃ* ||

²⁴⁶ 'Cowherds' is a common example of an 'untrained' person in Indian philosophical texts.

²⁴⁷ See Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000, page 41-43. Williams' position is in some respects antithetical to mine. His argument would be that Sanskrit grammar is a specialised set of mere conventions, and as such has no more value than what 'cowherds' may talk about.

more drastically, they should desist from framing alternative analyses of conventionality, since, as Arnold put it

What is conventionally true, in other words, is just our conventions, and any technical redescription thereof is, ipso facto, not conventionally valid.²⁴⁸

These types of reading are not without foundation. *Mādhyamikas* – as opposed to *Yogācāras* – did not create an *Abhidharma* of their own, and have been even read as a critique of the Abhidharmic project to ‘redescribe’ the world. Moreover, Candrakīrti openly states that

The worldly person indeed, without starting to analyse whether it is from itself or from other and so forth, understands only this much: from a cause, arises an effect. The *ācārya* also explained things in the same way.²⁴⁹

What his argument fails to acknowledge is that: i.) the *kāraṇa* system is an expressive structure found in the speech of ‘cowherds’ as well, not just the ‘idea’ of ‘a very elite group’; ii.) *Mādhyamikas* need not accept just as much as cowherds do, in all contexts, even conventionally. Point i.) has been dealt with in the preceding sections of this thesis, while I am going to argue for point ii.) in what follows. He also does not reproduce Prajñākaramati’s argument in its entirety, for which, see Appendix and also the later section of this thesis, about *svasaṃvedanā*.

Williams also remarks that

Since whatever are the latest scientific discoveries of psychologists, psychiatrists and neurosurgeons for example concerning the mind are not matters of ultimate truth, for the *Mādhyamika* they must come within the conventional.

There is more to this issue. Psychologists, psychiatrists and neurosurgeons may well (unwittingly) introduce ultimate reified entities (like a self, or an object of knowledge existing independently from cognition) as part of their methodological premises. This will stultify the plausibility of their conventional analysis, from a *Madhyamaka* point of view: just as it is the case for the non-Buddhist *lakṣaṇas*, which Candrakīrti dismisses. Hence, even if someone may claim to be doing merely conventional analysis, the *Mādhyamika* can be very much ‘concerned’ with bringing such claim under scrutiny. Indeed, to even think that a neurosurgeon may ‘discover’ something about the mind might carry certain ontological presuppositions. Note 3 on page 43 offers an important opening for a category like *svasaṃvedanā*: I would nonetheless argue that what Williams says of *svasaṃvedanā* could be extended to (at least some section) of *vyākaraṇa*. I do not think Williams has adequate consideration for the importance and special value of the *kāraṇa* system.

²⁴⁸ Dan Arnold, ‘Is *Svasaṃvitti* Transcendental? A Tentative Reconstruction Following Śāntarakṣita’, in *Asian Philosophy*, Vol.15, No.1, March 2005, pages 98-99.

²⁴⁹ *loko hi svataḥ parata ityevamādikaṃ vicāraṃ anavatārya kāraṇāt kāryam utpadyate ity etāvaṃmātraṃ pratipannaḥ | evaṃ ācāryo ’pi vyavasthāpayāmāsa || Prasannapadā 1.3.*

We could therefore interpret *Mādhyamikas* as accepting conventionally only as much as common people do, while on the other hand understanding the emptiness of shared conventions. In this case, Williams would be justified in questioning Prajñākaramati's fondness for Pāṇini's grammar, which is apparently difficult to understand as conventions shared by all.²⁵⁰

The last instance, though, exemplifies the inadequacy of the simple scheme so far adduced: important sections of *Madhyamaka* literature (verses, passages, or even whole chapters of important works) do not content themselves with understanding conventions in the very same manner as untrained 'cowherds' would. I thus believe, on the strength of textual evidence and interpretive cogency, that the identity between *Mādhyamikas* and 'common people' should be further qualified.

A plausible starting point for a more nuanced reading is the passage quoted earlier. What Candrakīrti is stating should be seen within a specific, restricted context – the context of avoiding essentialist dead ends in interpreting causation. A common person (*loka*) accepts causal regularities, without trying to establish cause and effect in terms of identity or difference. This statement should probably not be taken to imply much more. We cannot expect *Mādhyamikas* to turn to the least erudite and to the philosophically untrained, ask them what they believe and accept, and use that as a basis to talk of conventions. What here is more plausibly meant is that, all we need for the employment and recognition of causal regularities is the regularity itself, not a discussion about the identity or difference of the elements at play (this point is also made by Garfield). This does not entail that *Mādhyamikas* cannot accept and prefer certain more refined

²⁵⁰ I have amply argued in Chapter 1 that the types of Pāṇini's rules used by *Mādhyamikas*, including Prajñākaramati, have to do with the expressive structure of the language, rather than with morphological details. Hence, the question of their wide applicability cannot be so easily dismissed.

redescriptions of conventional truths. Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti (as I have noticed) regularly employ two sets of refined analysis, not available to the untrained: these being *Abhidharma* and *Vyākaraṇa*. Where the non-*Mādhyamika* sees a person, *Mādhyamikas* may decide to speak of the interplay of *skandhas*, *dhatus* and *āyatanas* through the causal connections of *hetus* (causes) and *pratyayas* (conditions), or would analyse the same process in terms of the syntactical categories, which form the interpretive structure of any conception of action. There is good textual evidence to corroborate this, as I hope to have shown already.

Regarding Arnold's argument about redescription, I am unable to ascertain what he means by the term. Grammar, medicine, *Abhidharma* and many other branches of knowledge could be all termed 'redescriptions', but it would be implausible to argue that, being technical, they do not count any more as conventions. At any rate, *Mādhyamikas* employ all three.

Moreover, what counts as a description and what as a re-description is hard to establish. Arnold may mean that any description, which introduces ontological ultimates in the scheme of conventions, is by that token going beyond its proper boundaries: I would then have no qualm. This flaw would for example accrue to Dignāga's *svalakṣaṇa*, at least in Candrakīrti's reading. Since Arnold's statement is very concise, I cannot ascertain whether my understanding really differs from his.

The reasons for *Mādhyamikas'* usage of *Abhidharma* and *Vyākaraṇa* are in part related. Both systems offer sets of very refined definitions (*lakṣaṇas*) and, as we have seen, conventions rest on identifying phenomena through such *lakṣaṇas*. Conventional understanding works through definition and determination of its intended referents. Without the possibility of conceptually circumscribing

phenomena, there could be no conventions. Thus, the framing of an intentional referent (a 'target', *lakṣya*) is closely connected to the determination of its characteristics: it follows that the more refined and intelligent are the definitions, the better one's comprehension of conventional truth.

4.2.1 Candrakīrti on the *svalakṣaṇa* and Prajñākaramati on *svasamvedanā*

The acceptability of specific conventions, even from Candrakīrti's viewpoint, depends from certain means to acquire valid knowledge (*Prasannapadā* lists four as acceptable). Candrakīrti specifies on occasions that the systems of non-Buddhist philosophy are unacceptable, as they make mistakes even from the point of view of conventional truth. They are *yuktidhūrāḥ* (illogical) and accept a permanent Self of one type or the other. On the other hand, Abhidharmic analysis does not rest on the acceptance of a permanent *ātman*, therefore it has the double advantage of not contradicting reason (from Candrakīrti's point of view) and of establishing selflessness of persons (which means, it is functional, as it goes towards a comprehension of emptiness).

This point is more important than it may seem, and it is worth elaborating upon. Why would the *lakṣaṇas* given by *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* philosophers not work even conventionally? The processes that they purport to describe make sense only in reference to a series of permanent, non-contingent categories, which ensure coherence even to any of the other categories they list. For example, the explanation of *karman* and rebirth rests upon the acceptance of a permanent self, without which the workings of the other *Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika* categories make no sense. It is crucial to consider this, else Candrakīrti's statement that they are *yuktidhūrāḥ* (unsound) could be nothing but gratuitous.

Candrakīrti's employment of *Abhidharma* testifies to his acceptance of the latter as a set of conventionally valid definitions: I hope to have demonstrated this. Nevertheless, there are some unique traits in Candrakīrti's attitude towards *Abhidharma*.

In fact, a plausible manner to describe Candrakīrti's attitude is that, in matters of *Abhidharma*, he is quite flexible. If we take, for example, the rather important doctrine of momentariness (*kṣaṇikatva*), it can be easily seen to appear through the pages of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (this is important, as its place in conventions is explicitly discussed in Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati). Nevertheless, whether we accept a *Vaibhāṣika* or a *Sautrāntika* view of momentariness is quite immaterial to the arguments.²⁵¹

Yogācāra Abhidharma is on the other hand problematic, insofar as it accepts categories, which in Candrakīrti's view do not fit in either of the two truths. This is also how I understand the critique of Dignāga's *svalakṣaṇa*. Ultimately, there are no *lakṣaṇas*: thus, *svalakṣaṇas* could not be taken as true in the ultimate sense (they could not be within the perception of the Noble Ones, as Candrakīrti puts it). On the other hand, if a *lakṣaṇa* is self-established, it ceases ipso facto to be conventional: since the mark of conventional truths is to be independently un-established (see the section on the *Lokātīta*). Thus, the reason for the unacceptability of Dignāga's *svalakṣaṇa* is not that it constitutes a technical redescription, but the impossibility of establishing it as either

²⁵¹ We can notice, though, that the starting point of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* resembles much more *Vaibhāṣika* rather than *Sautrāntika* positions, and that Candrakīrti's commentary follows suit. This may also be due to the popularity of *Vaibhāṣika* and the fact that *Sautrāntika* is after all a type of reformed *Vaibhāṣika* scheme, hence not representative of a 'mainstream' *Abhidharma*. Incidentally, the *Dharmasaṃgraha*, also bearing the name of *Nāgārjuna* as its author, does employ categories that are quite close to *Vaibhāṣika Abhidharma*. Although the work may not really be by *Nāgārjuna*, the fact that (perhaps even much later) his name would be associated to a *Vaibhāṣika* type of Abhidharmic scheme should not pass unnoticed.

conventionally or ultimately true. This is borne out by a passage of the *Prasannapadā*, already quoted in a different context:

If it is worldly usage, then necessarily, just like the *lakṣaṇa*, the *lakṣya* should be there. Therefore, this only is the defect. Or (should the twofold *lakṣaṇa* be accepted) as ultimate truth? Then, as the *lakṣya* is not there, the twofold *lakṣaṇa* is also not there.²⁵²

Candrakīrti warns that, conventionally, there must be both (*lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya*). Since the theory of *svalakṣaṇas* does away with the *lakṣya*, it does not fit within conventional truth. Ultimately, neither can be established, and thus not only the *lakṣya*, but the *svalakṣaṇa* too cannot be ultimate.

Significantly, right after this passage, Candrakīrti appeals to the other set of regulatory tools, with which he measures conventional validity, and charges the *Yogācāras* with an incongruent handling of Sanskrit grammar, in particular of the *kāraṇas*:

That in this way an explanation of words following the link between the action and the *kāraṇas* is not accepted, make things very difficult. You communicate just through these words employing the link between the action and the *kāraṇas*, while you do not wish the meaning of the words to be action, instrument and so on: alas, your usage is bound to mere fancy!²⁵³

In other words, a philosopher cannot be completely idiosyncratic, inventing a new grammar that may defy all the commonly accepted syntactical structures: especially since he is using them. And this is, at least according to Candrakīrti, what the *Yogācāras* are attempting. It would resemble someone saying: ‘The

²⁵² [...] *yadi laukiko vyavahāraḥ tadā avaśyaṃ lakṣaṇaṃ lakṣyeṇāpi bhavitavyam | tataś ca sa eva doṣaḥ | atha paramārthaḥ | tadā lakṣyābhāvāt lakṣaṇadvayam api nāsti [...]*

²⁵³ *atha śabdānām evaṃ kriyākāraṇasambandhapūrvikā vyūtpattir nāṅgukriyate tad idam atikaṣṭam | tair eva kriyākāraṇasambandhapravṛttaiḥ śabdair bhavān vyavaharati śabdārthanā kriyākāraṇādikaṃ ca necchatūti aho bata icchāmātrapratibaddhapravṛttir bhavataḥ ||*
Prasannapadā, 1.3.

sentence I am uttering is not in English'. What should we understand it to mean? Incidentally, the tenor of Candrakīrti's objection and its implications answers some of the doubts raised by Williams about the actual importance of Sanskrit *vyākaraṇa*. It is not a matter of being elitist, but to avoid self-contradicting or self-referential expressions.²⁵⁴

If my reading is plausible, then Śāntarakṣita's and Mokṣākaragupta's systems do not differ so *drastically* from Candrakīrti's, as the latter's own logic is flexible enough to accommodate alternative Abhidharmic conventions: as long as these do not create a confusion between reciprocally dependent definitions (conventional truths) and their emptiness (ultimate lack of *lakṣaṇas*). I say this on the premise that Mipham Rinpoche, Williams, and Arnold are right in their account of the reformed *svalakṣaṇa*.²⁵⁵

To this, one might retort that Prajñākaramati's criticism of *svasaṃvedanā* in his commentary to *Bodhicaryāvatāra* verse 9.21 quotes precisely Śāntarakṣita and refutes his (and Mokṣākaragupta's) defence of this category. Moreover, the refutation resembles very strictly what Candrakīrti employed to refute the *svalakṣaṇa*, which suggests that, in fact, it cannot but work both ultimately and conventionally. If this is so, how could one possibly uphold that Mipham Rinpoche, Williams and Arnold are not, in effect, remarkably mistaken?

In this case, my argument is mainly based on an attempt to give the strongest and most convincing interpretation of Prajñākaramati's stance. Certain weaknesses would in fact follow from taking his grammatical argument as referring to a conventional refutation of *svasaṃvedanā*, and they could be

²⁵⁴ See above, Note 13.

²⁵⁵ Again see Dan Arnold, 'Is *Svasaṃvitti* Transcendental? A Tentative Reconstruction Following Śāntarakṣita', in *Asian Philosophy*, Vol.15, No.1, March 2005

avoided by restricting it to the sphere of ultimate analysis. Besides, there are a few indications on the part of Prajñākaramati's himself that the refutation is not on the ultimate level.

The debate about *svasaṃvedanā* or self-awareness is long and complex, but here I am merely concerned with four steps in the alternation of objections and replies:

- i. knowledge is said to know itself;
- ii. this is criticised as entailing that the same thing is at once agent (*kartr*) and object of the action (*karman*), which is unacceptable, as nothing can act upon itself;
- iii. it is then proposed that the relationship between knowledge and itself is not agent-object-action, and that the word *svasaṃvedanā* is not being used in that sense;
- iv. the *Mādhyamika* objector retorts that the word *svasaṃvedanā* is understood by all listeners as entailing an agent and object of the action: is it not that the opponent is speaking through *kāraṅkas*?

The last step is akin to what we found in Candrakīrti's refutation of the *svalakṣaṇa*. Prajñākaramati's phrasing of his argument is remarkably similar Candrakīrti's own:

We expressed a refutation, relying on the word-meaning well established through conventional usage through the distinction into action and *kāraṅkas*, since the word 'self-awareness' expresses such a meaning. If on the other hand, out of fear of flaws, even the word meaning well established in the world is abandoned, then your refutation is going to be just from the world. Even in this way, there is no establishment of self-awareness in the ultimate sense.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁶ *kriyākāraṅkabhedena vyavahāraprasiddham śabdārtham adhigamya dūṣaṇam uktam svasaṃvedanāśabdasya tadarthābhīdhyakatvāt | yadi punar doṣabhayāl lokaprasiddho'pi śabdārthaḥ parityajyate tadā lokata eva bādhā bhavato bhaviṣyati | ittham api na paramārthataḥ svasaṃvedanāśiddhiḥ ||* Commentary on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.20.

The last sentence, it seems to me, emphasises how Prajñākaramati's main interest is in refuting self-awareness as an ultimate. There are contextual reasons to believe so, since the refutation of self-awareness is part of a wider refutation that mind may be ultimately existent (i.e. the *Cittamātra* position).

There is at least one case where grammatical analysis would show the necessity of a conventional acceptance of a reflexive relation.²⁵⁷ When a relation of identity is described, even in Sanskrit, one and the same agent acts as one's own qualifier (*viśeṣaṇa*) and what is qualified (*viśeṣya*). Does it therefore follow that *Mādhyamikas* cannot speak of identities, even conventionally? And if they cannot speak of identity, can they speak of difference? If they give up both identity and difference, can they speak at all?

For these reasons, I believe that the grammatical part of Prajñākaramati's argument is stronger when restricted to a refutation of *svasaṃvedanā* as an ultimate. The following sections of his commentary to 9.26 suggest that this is indeed how it was intended:

When it is said that the conventional usages such as 'seen' and so on would not be there, is it that it would not be there in the ultimate sense, or conventionally? If it is said that 'it would not be there in the ultimate sense', then this is indeed acceptable for us. Since, for something conventional, there is no descending into considerations about the ultimate.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁷ I owe to Tom Tillemanns the simple but important parallel between *svasaṃvedanā* and identity.

²⁵⁸ *yad ucyate dṛṣṭādivyavahāro na syād iti sa kiñ paramārthato na syāt saṃvṛtyā vā | tatra yadī paramārthato na syād ity ucyate tadā priyam idam asmākam | na hi sāmṛtasya paramārthacintāyām avatāro'sti ||*

On the other hand, the existence of mind only sometimes spoken of by the Blessed One, will be explained as an interpretable meaning, like the aggregates, entrances etc...²⁵⁹

The last point opens some unexpected interpretive avenues. Prajñākaramati says that *cittamātra* can be taken as *neyārtha*, interpretable meaning, just as the aggregates and the entrances. One may say that any *Mādhyamika* would have to necessarily agree to this, as the only alternative left would be to discard some of the Buddha's own words as completely invalid.²⁶⁰ Interpretable categories, on the other hand, are acceptable as conventions. Following Śāntideva's and Prajñākaramati's own arguments, *cittamātra* could not be maintained in any way without upholding some variant of the doctrine of *svasaṃvedanā*. This necessarily implies that, in some forms of conventional descriptions, *svasaṃvedanā* must be acceptable.

If this is the case, the force of Prajñākaramati's recourse to the *kāraṅkas* is not identical to Candrakīrti's own. This might be either because the *svalakṣaṇa* works differently from the idea of *svasaṃvedanā*, or because Prajñākaramati's attitude towards the issue may be at variance with Candrakīrti's own. Either way, it would entail that giving descriptions that do not follow the normal understanding of *kāraṅkas* can be a pardonable shortcoming, at least in the case of *svasaṃvedanā*, and as long as they are explained to be so.

²⁵⁹ *yat tu kvacid bhagavatā cittamātrāstitvam uktam tat skandhāyatanādīvan neyārthayayeti kathayisyate ||*

²⁶⁰ Lopez notices how in effect several *Mādhyamika* authors, including for example Candrakīrti and Jñānagarbha, accept the idea of *Yogācāra* being a stepping-stone. See: D.S. Jr. Lopez, 'On the Interpretation of the Mahāyāna Sūtras', in Donald S.Jr. Lopez (ed.), *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993.

4.2.2 Are *Mādhyamikas* 'satisfied with no analysis' ?

I have argued in favour of the importance of conventional refinement in *Madhyamaka*, despite Williams' remarks and despite Arnold's statement about redescription. Besides these, it is necessary to discuss Eckel's idea of 'the satisfaction of no analysis'.²⁶¹

In a reconstruction of Tsongkhapa's thought, Eckel has identified abstention from analysis (and satisfaction about such abstention) as an important trait of *Madhyamaka* thought, referring in particular to certain passages in the *Prasannapadā*.²⁶² While I find the general thrust of the argument very convincing, I believe that, as in the example of 'accepting as much as common people do' some crucial qualifications are necessary. The section of the *Prasannapadā* taken up by Eckel is directly connected to the question of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*, and at this point it should not be difficult to place this discussion within the broader context so far reconstructed.

The *Prasannapadā* quotes the example of 'Rāhu's head' as a case where, under analysis, Rāhu is found to be no more than the head, and yet the expression is acceptable: is this not the same as when (in the *Abhidharma*) one speaks of 'the hardness of the earth'? Eckel correctly remarks that here Candrakīrti is concerned with answering an opponent who argues that, in the case of the hardness of the earth, the definition and what is defined are ultimately the same. This is in the context of the possible identification of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*, defending the idea of *svalakṣaṇa* as propounded by Dignāga. It is practically the

²⁶¹ See M.D. Eckel, 'The Satisfaction of No Analysis', in G.B.J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (eds.), *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika distinction*, Boston: Wisdom, 2003, pages 173-203.

²⁶² I believe this idea could be linked to the Sanskrit *avicāramāṇīyatā*, which on the other hand means, 'being satisfactory as long as there is no analysis': hence a slightly different concept.

same question we found in the *Abhiharmakośa*, where the position of the identity of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* was argued for by the *Sautrāntika* (as discussed in Chapter 2).

One section of Eckel's reconstruction is, to my understanding, quite off the mark:

Candrakīrti argues that the words “body of a pestle” and “head of Rāhu” can be used to answer legitimate questions in ordinary usage (*laukikavyavahāra*). If someone mentions the word “body” or “head”, he says, it is perfectly understandable for someone to ask, “Whose body?” or “Whose head?” These questions can express legitimate curiosity. But there is no reason for anyone to be curious about hardness and earth: everyone knows that earth is hard.²⁶³

The first inaccuracy in this passage regards the level of technicality involved. Eckel says that ‘everyone knows that earth is hard’ and in the accompanying note (38) he specifies that ‘everyone’ means anyone ‘knowledgeable about the Indian theory of gross elements’. In effect, there is no shared ‘Indian theory of gross elements’ (at least to my knowledge), and what constitutes the *lakṣaṇa* of earth is a matter of dispute. For example, in the *Vaiśeṣika* system, earth is defined as the substratum for the quality (*guṇa*) of odour (*gandha*), which is not necessarily an acceptable definition for a Buddhist. What Candrakīrti and his opponents are discussing about is the *lakṣaṇa* of earth as accepted in the *Abhidharma*: thus, in effect, a technical redescription involving a good degree of analysis – or, if one wishes, curiosity.

The second inaccuracy regards precisely ‘curiosity’, which, I suspect, Eckel uses to translate the Sanskrit *ākāṅkṣā*. The latter is a technical term, often translated with ‘verbal expectancy’, and I would argue that here it is used in the same sense. Candrakīrti is saying that when the word ‘head’ is uttered, it creates

²⁶³ *Ibidem*, page 190.

a verbal expectancy for its possible owner (consisting of a whole body plus a mind), since it is usually the case that a head is accompanied by other limbs to form the body of a person – and since usually a person is formed by more than just a head. It is therefore acceptable to speak of ‘Rāhu’s head’ to satisfy this expectancy, even though there is no ‘Rāhu’ apart from the head. Otherwise, we could have been speaking of someone else’s head, and such possibility should be excluded in order to refer to the specific head we wish to indicate. In other words, even though there is only a head, the mere word ‘head’ retains the ambiguity of being possibly accompanied by other limbs, because this is usually the case. It is not a question of ‘curiosity’, but verbal expectancy.

On the other hand, Candrakīrti specifies that the case of ‘hardness’ is different. There is never any earth apart and beyond hardness, and therefore no expectancy is created in regards to earth as a necessary specification. Although non-Buddhists propose different *lakṣaṇas* for earth, there is no need to even consider them, as they are devoid of good reasoning (*yuk্তividhurāḥ*). Candrakīrti is not denouncing a case of illegitimate curiosity, as Eckel would have it. He is saying that here there is no verbal expectancy for something else, and therefore we cannot understand the expression ‘hardness of earth’ as satisfying the same communicative function as when we speak of ‘Rāhu’s head’.

In the passage quoted above, Eckel implies that the ‘satisfaction of no analysis’ is in reference to ‘hardness of earth’, where curiosity is not appropriate (since ‘everyone knows that earth is hard’); on the other hand, curiosity (and thus, analysis) is appropriate in the case of ‘Rāhu’s head’. I read Candrakīrti as saying precisely the opposite:

[...] because in the case of worldly usages one does not engage in such type of analysis, and because worldly referents are existent when not analysed. Just like, indeed, no self is possible when

analysed as different from form and so on, still from the point of view of worldly conventions it exists in reference to the aggregates, and in the same way Rāhu and a pestle exist: therefore, there is no success in the example.²⁶⁴

‘Rāhu’ and a ‘pestle’ exist as unanalysed verbalisations that satisfy the expectancy created by the words ‘head’ and ‘body’ respectively, just like ‘self’ is a conventional expression to identify certain aggregates, although under analysis it is not to be found beyond them. It is Rāhu and the pestle, in effect, that we should not be curious about: while we may well be curious about the hardness of earth (is it a sound definition, not resting on some ultimate, reified elements?)

The status of Abhidharmic definitions is different. They do not work as one-way specifications, where one of the referents (like ‘Rāhu’ or ‘pestle’) is, even conventionally, existent *only* as a functional delimiter to curb a certain verbal expectancy. Candrakīrti very clearly states that Abhidharmic definitions are acceptable, as far as they are taken to be conventions, indicating that he understands Nāgārjuna to accept as much. This was already exemplified earlier, in reference to the four *pratyayas* (in Chapter 3). Here, though, Candrakīrti gives a very general statement about the status of Abhidharmic *lakṣaṇas*, and their difference from expressions like ‘Rāhu’ or ‘self’:

In this way for earth and the rest, although there is no *lakṣya* under analysis as different from hardness and the rest, and the *lakṣaṇa* would be devoid of a support without the *lakṣya*, even so, considering that it is only conventions, the *Ācāryas* posited their establishment through a reciprocally dependent establishment. And this should necessarily be accepted. Since otherwise, conventions would not be disjoined from reasoning, and that itself would be reality (*tattva*) and not conventions. And

²⁶⁴ *laukike vyavahāre itthanivicārāpravṛtter avicārataś ca laukikapadārthānām astitvāt || Ibidem.*

it is not that only a pestle and such other things are impossible when analysed through reasoning. What then? By a reasoning that will be explained, even form, feeling, and so on are not possible: it would then follow that just like in the case of a ‘pestle’ one should accept even conventionally their non-existence. But this is not the case, so that is false.²⁶⁵

In the expression ‘hardness of earth’ both hardness and earth are conventionally existent as the reciprocally dependent pair of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*. The significant mistake of the *Sautrāntikas* (and in this case, Dignāga’s) has been to attempt an explanation of their status that replaces reciprocal dependence with ontological identity. The examples adduced, though, failed to convince Candrakīrti since, in the case of ‘Rāhu’s head’, there is an ontological disparity between ‘Rāhu’ and ‘head’, as the first merely functions to delimit which head we are speaking about, and has no existence whatsoever beyond that function. The same function cannot be ascribed to ‘the hardness of earth’, since a verbal expectancy of something beyond hardness does not arise. Thus, the relationship between the two terms of the expression does not rest on ontological disparity, as both have the same level of existence: conventional and reciprocally dependent. As such, they are a valid pair of *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa*.

I am aware of having repeated similar arguments throughout this discussion: but Candrakīrti’s stance on the issue is subtle and my understanding turns Eckel’s position upside-down. Candrakīrti was not in favour of inheriting ‘unanalysed’ conventionalities, except in a very specific sense, and the ‘hardness of earth’ is no such thing. It is a case of Abhidharmic analysis, and as such an acceptable

²⁶⁵ *evam prthivyādīnāṃ yadyapi kāṭhinyādivyatiriktāṃ vicāryamāṇāṃ lakṣyaṃ nāsti lakṣyavyatirekeṇa ca lakṣaṇaṃ nirāśrayam tathāpi saṃvṛter eveti parasparāpekṣayā tayorḥ siddhyā siddhiṃ vyavasthāpayām babhūvur ācāryāḥ | avaśyaṃ caitad evam abhyupeyam | anyathā hi saṃvṛtir upapattya na viyujyate tad eva tattvam eva syān na saṃvṛtiḥ | na ca upapattya vicāryamāṇānāṃ śīlāputrakādīnāṃ evāsambhavaḥ | kim tarhi | vakṣyamāṇayā yuktyā rūpavedanādīnāṃ api nāsti sambhava iti teṣāṃ api saṃvṛtyā śīlāputrakādīvaṃ nāstitvam āstheyam syāt | na caitad evam ity asad etat || Prasannapadā 1.3.*

refinement of one's conventional understanding. If this is the case, is there anything that Abhidharmic analysis should not analyse or be curious about?

By now, my answer should be expectable: the problem with *Abhidharma* is not in the analysis of conventions, per se, but in the tendency to essentialise the elements at play in the analysis: in overdoing the analysis to the extent of turning it into an ontological statement. In particular, an attempt to identify *lakṣya* and *lakṣaṇa* as ultimately different (as the *Vaibhāṣikas* would do) or as ultimately the same (the *Sautrāntika* position) is the analytical excess (or perhaps, the lack of sufficient analysis) that Candrakīrti, and Nāgārjuna before him, would resist.

The point of departure from the Abhidharmic description is in this assessment of *lakṣaṇa* and *lakṣya* as neither ultimately identical nor different, but as reciprocally dependent. The contours of Abhidharmic analysis, though, remain acceptable for *Madhyamaka*, since they still give a picture of conventions that does not rest on the acceptance of some ultimate 'self', and on the other hand they do not derive consciousness from material events (they do not essentialise the object of cognition). I hope that this will be considered a sufficient corroboration of my argument about the importance of Abhidharmic analysis for *Madhyamaka* conventions: this conclusion goes against the grain of any argument against redescription; nor do I find Eckel's interpretation of the 'satisfaction of no analysis' entirely convincing.

4.2.3 More on Candrakīrti and *kāra*kas

Moreover, Mahāmati, all *dharma*s are devoid of *kriyā* and *kāra*ka: they do not arise, due to the absence of a *kāra*ka. Therefore it is said: all *dharma*s are unarisen.²⁶⁶

I have discussed the importance of grammar in Chapter 1, and I have exemplified its usages in the discussions of *svalakṣaṇa* and *svasaṃvedanā*. There are a few more reasons, though, for which I think that it is especially the *kāra*ka system to have found such a prominent place in *Madhyamaka*.

Discussions about the proper identification of grammatical agents are attested even in the *Abhidharma* as already indicated in Chapter 2. In this sense, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are in line with an Abhidharmic trend.

A characteristic feature of Candrakīrti's commentary, and of Nāgārjuna's own text, is to take single verses of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* as blueprints for multiple refutations. This means, a verse represents a certain syntactical structure, where the commutability of the specific elements affords for a much wider applicability. Significantly, this is especially true of the second chapter (*gatāgataparīkṣa*), where it is rather clear that the action of going is simply an example extendible to any other action. That the whole argument rests on *vyākaraṇa*, has been convincingly shown by Bhattacharya.²⁶⁷ More specifically,

²⁶⁶ *punar aparaṃ mahāmate kriyākāra*karahitāḥ sarvadharmaṃ notpadyante 'kārakatvāt | *tenocyate 'nutpannāḥ sarvadharmaṃ iti* | *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, 2, 170

²⁶⁷ See Kamaleshwar Bhattacharya, 'Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion: their grammatical basis', in A.L. Basham et al., (eds.), *A corpus of Indian studies. Essays in honour of Professor Gaurinath Sastri*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1980, pages 85-95. See also: Kamaleshwar Bhattacharya, 'Notes Bouddhiques', in *Indologica Taurinensia*, Vol.VII: Torino, 1979, Kamaleshwar Bhattacharya, 'The grammatical Basis of Nāgārjuna's arguments. Some further considerations', in *Indologica Taurinensia*, 8-9, 1980-81, pages 35 – 43, Bhattacharya, K., 'Back to Nāgārjuna and grammar', in *Adyar Library Bulletin*, 58-9, 1994-95, pages 178 – 189. I thank Ian Westerhoff for making all these articles readily available.

it rests on the analysis of an action in terms of *kāraḥas*. Since *kāraḥas* are the common manner in which any reader of Sanskrit will understand (and express or analyse) actions, the force and broad applicability of the choice becomes evident.

Certain facets of Candrakīrti's employment of syntactical relations (*kāraḥas*) deserve special attention: a discussion of the implications of his views might clarify *Madhyamaka*'s relation to both *Yogācāra* and *Cārvāka*.

Candrakīrti reiterates time and again that we can (and do) speak of actions only within the conventional framework of the *kāraḥa* system – therefore, with agents and possibly objects of the actions. The triad of *karṭṛ*, *karman* and *kriyā* is there whether we refer to conscious or insentient processes, but in the case of consciousness this structure precludes certain possibilities.

Candrakīrti has been read as criticising the *Yogācāra* on the basis of their acceptance of an objectless subject. This might be more precisely rephrased as an objectless agent, considering that Candrakīrti was not referring to a subject-syntax. The last point is to be noted: subject and agent are to be carefully distinguished to understand the weight of Candrakīrti's claims. For example, in *bhāve prayoga* type of sentences like *ariṇā na jīyate*, we have a subject-less, but not agent-less, construction. Consciousness being the agent, his position amounts to saying that a thesis of mere consciousness is precluded: and *cittamātra* (mere consciousness) would be the same as *Yogācāra*.

This reconstruction of Candrakīrti's argument is probably correct, but also incomplete: an important prior consideration should be retained as the background of his objections, before assessing their strength. Candrakīrti had in fact specified that we speak of actions not without speaking of agents (as I noted,

this is the case in Sanskrit even when we do away with subjects). With this premise, the possible *Yogācāra* rebuttal that *viññāna* exists and is devoid of the agent/object dichotomy has no force. Candrakīrti has not only said that *cittamātra* does not make sense, being an objectless subject: he also said that *viññāna* cannot be spoken doing away with agents.²⁶⁸ In fact, this is well understood by *Mādhyamika* authors, who reconstruct (I would say, correctly) the *Yogācāra* position as accepting consciousness as real, as an agent-less and objectless action: not as an object-less agent, or subject.²⁶⁹

We may then apply the same structure to analyse the *Cārvāka* position.²⁷⁰ If consciousness were derivable from matter, the latter would pre-exist as a possible but not actualised *jñeya* (object of knowledge) without *jñātṛ* (agent of knowledge) and, in fact, without *jñāna* (knowledge as an action): which, I believe, Candrakīrti would not accept.

One could retort that objects may be spoken of without being described as objects of knowledge, or alternatively that past objects are objects of present knowledge (they are objects of present intentionality). One wonders whether these rebuttals could resist *Madhyamaka* analysis, as the issue becomes quite specified and would be worth much greater space. Although Candrakīrti does not discuss the problem in these terms, there are reasons to believe that in his

²⁶⁹ See for example the section of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* concerned with *Yogācāra*, especially verse 9.16 and commentary, translated in Appendix.

²⁷⁰ Tom Tillemanns presented a very similar argument during the Buddhist Symposium of the Centre for Buddhist Studies, Kathmandu University, Kathmandu, October 2006. As I had developed my arguments independently from his, there is a certain difference in the focus, since I look at the issue mainly through the *kāraṇa* system. Neither of us, though, is the first to bring forth such an argument: Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso does that in his exposition of the *Yogācāra* view and its shortcomings. See Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso, *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*, Oxford: Lonchen Foundation, 1986, page 40.

system, sentiency cannot be pre-existed by the insentient. In the *Madhyamakāvatāra*, he remarks:

It is only mind that arranges the variegated world of living beings
and the receptacle world.
Since, the whole world is said to be born of *karman*, and without
mind there is no *karman*.²⁷¹

The world is born from intentionality, and is expressed through *kāraṅkas*, which resemble its structure and, in the case of *karman*, bear the same name. Candrakīrti's (and plausibly Nāgārjuna's) employment of the term *karman*, oscillates between the idea of action and its grammatical sense of object of the action. May had perceived and commented upon this oscillation.²⁷²

To sum up the difference between *Mādhyamikas* and common persons: *Mādhyamikas* do not so much refrain from analysis of conventions, but from any attempt to reify the elements at play in the analysis. The *vicāra* which one should not engage is whether these elements are ultimately identical or different and so on: since if they could be identified in this way, they would exist as ultimate, and not as conventions.

On the other hand, this does not prevent *Mādhyamikas* to regard certain ways of understanding conventions as more sound; nor does it follow that their preference is mere cultural inheritance. Candrakīrti discards non-Buddhist definitions (*lakṣaṇas*) since they are *yuktividhurāḥ* (devoid of good reasoning)

²⁷¹ *sattvalokam atha bhājanalokam cūttam eva racayaty aticitram | karmajam hi jagad uttam aśeṣam karma cūttam avadhūya na cāsti ||* Quoted in the Sanskrit by Prajñākaramati, while commenting on *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.73.

²⁷² See Jacques May (tr.), *Candrakīrti: Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti (Commentaire limpide au Traité du Milieu)*, Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1959, note 413 page 144. The most perceptive of May's remarks are perhaps those regarding the fact that 'En fait, les divers sens du terme *karman* ne se séparent pas dans l'esprit de nos auteurs[...]' and despite its brevity in comparison to Gerow's discussion, the argument he makes for their identification is similar and highlights certain crucial points. Especially, may marked that the 'object-directs' are nothing but 'spécifications (*viśeṣaṇa*) de son acte', which is not very different from Gerow's reproduction of the late grammarians' argument for the ultimate identity between *phala* and *vyāpāra*.

and not because of some invocation of authority. The *Abhidharma*'s mistake was not in the analysis, but in its reification. This reification is often detected as the usage of a self-referential language, which betrays the very expressive structures it uses: and Candrakīrti identifies the latter as the *kāra* system.

4.3 Identity and difference between *Mādhyamikas* and *Cārvākās*. *Paraloka*, *karman*, and the origin of *viññāna*. The meaning of *pratipattirbheda*

The first distinction I made - between *Mādhyamikas* and 'cowherds' - is to some extent logically neutral: I intend to say that, even if one were to start applying *Madhyamaka* analysis to unrefined conventions, it would not ipso facto stultify an ascertainment of their emptiness. This is predicated upon the axiom that, anything being empty, emptiness can be accessed by applying ultimate analysis to any type of conventionally perceived phenomena, whether they have passed through the refining lenses of *Abhidharma* and *Vyākaraṇa*, or otherwise.

On the other hand, the further distinction I wish to highlight verges upon an important point of interpretation. The possibility of a materialistic reading of *Madhyamaka* would have far-reaching implications, which traditional scholars (including Nāgārjuna) would consider undesirable. In classical Indian thought, the materialistic position is normally represented by the *Cārvāka* school. As the *Cārvākas* deny a 'self' surviving the body's disintegration, their position was at times felt akin to the Buddhist - in fact, in the graded exposition of 'all views' (*sarvadarśana*) by *Mādhava*, Buddhists come right after *Cārvākas*: meaning that they are second worst. This might be one of the reasons why the Buddhists took so much pain to distinguish their own position from the *Cārvākas*, and

denounced the latter's doctrines as lower than even the positing of a permanent self.

There are three related issues where the Buddhist and *Cārvākas* openly diverge. Firstly, *Cārvākas* denied *paraloka*, the other world. There is ample evidence to show that the latter refers to nothing else than the next life, the world (whichever it might be) that one shall inhabit after one's death. Not only this is the common usage of the term in Sanskrit, and even in modern Indian vernaculars, but this is the manner in which Buddhist texts of all hues, and *Madhyamaka* ○

authors like Candrakīrti, consistently employ the term. Thus, to state it briefly, *Cārvākas* deny, while *Mādhyamikas* accept, repeated birth and death.

Without rebirth, extended causality over more than one life, i.e. the law of *karman*, is of course untenable. Here is the second obvious difference: *Mādhyamikas* accept karmic causality.

Both of these differences stem from a basic divergence in the understanding of consciousness and its origin. *Cārvākas* explain sentiency as an epiphenomenon of materiality. The physical elements would gain sentiency under specific conditions; much in the way fermented barley might acquire alcoholic gradation. Consciousness is therefore no more than a conditioned quality of the material elements, bound to disappear with the dissolution of the body at death.

Mādhyamikas, on the other hand, emphasise that consciousness and materiality are distinguishable, and that the former could not originate from the latter. Both Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti speak of consciousness in non-reductionist terms. Nāgārjuna writes that consciousness enters a realm of existence (*viññānam*

sanniveśate saṃskārapratyayaṃ gatau). Candrakīrti is even more specific, as he writes that

Thus, in analogy to such things as an image and its reflection, when consciousness conglomerates in the mother's womb, name and form, conditioned by consciousness, comes about (...) if in this realm of existence consciousness does not conglomerate, then there would be no manifestation of name and form: 'if, Ānanda, consciousness were not to enter the mother's womb, then the foetus would not become a foetus'- thus from the utterance (of the Buddha).²⁷³

In short, *Madhyamaka* does not diverge from the wider Abhidharmic outlook about the relationship between consciousness and materiality. This was certainly not a uniform or unproblematic position, but I am not aware of any Indian Buddhist school that would have ascribed second-degree existence to mind and relegated it to a mere temporary quality to be lost with the body's death. Indian Buddhism seems to make little sense without the overall background of continued birth - the continued suffering of *saṃsāra*.

In two different passages of the *Prasannapadā*, Candrakīrti expounds the *Cārvākas*' position, highlighting how they do in fact deny the other world and *karman*, and how they reduce consciousness to materiality. Candrakīrti also explicitly tells us that these denials cannot be shared by *Mādhyamikas*. In one passage, the hypothetical opponent charges *Mādhyamikas* with being a variety of nihilists (*nāstikaviśiṣṭāḥ*), on the ground that, like the materialists, they deny this and the other world, the self, etc. Candrakīrti replies that the significant difference is that *Mādhyamikas* apply these denials only from the point of view of ultimate analysis, while accepting *karman* and rebirth as valid conventions.

²⁷³ *tadevaṃ bimbapratibimbādīnyāyena mātuḥ kuṣau vijñāne saṃmūrcchite vijñānapratyayaṃ nāmarūpaṃ niṣicyate, kṣarati prādurbhavatītyarthaḥ | yadi iha gatau vijñānaṃ na saṃmūrchūtaṃ syāt, tadā nāmarūpaprādurbhāvo na syāt; 'sa ced ānanda vijñānaṃ mātuḥ kuṣiṃ nāvakramet, na tat kalalaṃ kalatavāya saṃvarteta' iti vacanāt || Prasannapadā 26.2.*

This is what I would like to stress: what constitutes Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti's philosophy is not merely the techniques they employ to refute inherent existence, but also certain specific takes on conventional truth. Moreover, the two issues are closely linked.

To present *Madhyamaka* only in terms of its insistence on emptiness, without couching this in a wider discourse about *saṃsāra*, suffering, and its ending, is to misrepresent the very direction, and possibly outcome, of its dialectical methods. This is what, I believe, Candrakīrti addressed in the continuation of the debate just introduced.

The hypothetical opponent is not satisfied with the reply that, between nihilists and *Mādhyamikas*, the difference is a matter of conventionalities: he retorts that, even so, factually (*vāstutaḥ*) there is no difference between the two, meaning that their position as to how things really are (or, in this case, are not) is not distinguishable. Interestingly, Candrakīrti assents. Yet, he qualifies his assent by introducing a specification, and an analogy, which should tell us something about the relation between the two truths.

Candrakīrti responds to his opponent's charges by saying that, although ultimately the denial of this or the other world, a 'self' and so on, may be identical in the case of *Madhyamaka* and nihilism, still, there occurs a *difference in the one who comprehends (pratipatti-bheda)*. He elaborates through an analogy. Suppose that a theft had taken place. Two witnesses may be called to testify in front of a jury: the first witness has seen the crime, the second has not. Nevertheless, both of them declare the suspected person to be the thief, but for different reasons. The first saw the theft happening, the second personally dislikes the thief. Now, the real witness is like the *Mādhyamika*, who denies

ultimate rebirth, while accepting it conventionally. The second is like the materialist, who denies rebirth both ultimately as well as conventionally.

Please notice that, regarding the second witness, Candrakīrti is telling that he is still lying, although what he says corresponds to truth in one sense. The contents of an assertion are not the only parameter to decide its truth: another is the relation of the speaker to that content. If we transpose the analogy, it would suggest that anyone who would not accept rebirth conventionally while at the same time denying it ultimately would be - from his or her own side - lying, even in respects to the ultimate denial. This suggests that a proper comprehension of ultimate analysis rests on a specific understanding of conventional truth, and that without such understanding, ultimately disowning the existence of *karman* and rebirth is flawed. This is not surprising, when we recall how Nāgārjuna himself had warned that the teaching of the Buddhas rests on two truths (*dve satye*), and that, without comprehending conventional truth, one will not be able to access ultimate truth. If anything, it would be more in keeping with the *Madhyamaka* emphasis on *prajñāpti* to give higher level existence to mind (as some like Śāntarakṣita do). To decide between knowledge and the object of knowledge in favour of the latter's ontological primacy would hardly square with *Madhyamaka* dialectics, as Nāgārjuna himself warned that the two are mutually dependent.

4.4 A system of graded *saṃvṛtisatya*

It is usually accepted that in *Madhyamaka*, *saṃvṛti* may have at least two degrees: the categories of false *saṃvṛti* versus authentic *saṃvṛti* (*mithyāsaṃvṛti* and *tathyaṣaṃvṛti*) are employed and explained by both Candrakīrti and Prajñākaramati. False *saṃvṛti*, though, is not really a truth, even for the ordinary person: hence it cannot be said to be a degree of conventional *truth*.

The distinction between conventional truth and falsity helps explain *Mādhyamikas* recourse to *vyākaraṇa* and their criticisms of others' self-contradiction in employing the *kāraka* system, while at the same time denying it (Candrakīrti's refutation of the *svalakṣaṇa*). All of this regards the internal coherence of conventional truth, where *lakṣaṇas* should not be 'devoid of good reasoning' (*yuktividhurāḥ*), as Candrakīrti puts it.

What the analysis so far presented suggests, though, is that even within conventional truths, a gradation may be accepted: otherwise, it would be difficult to understand the recurrent employment of *Abhidharma* categories by the *Madhyamaka*. One could argue that this is due to an inherited framework of conventional analysis, and that *Mādhyamikas* could have well started from a different one. This interpretation, though, is arguably speculative, and fails to make good sense of the relationship between *Madhyamaka* and what it purports to be: an interpretation of the central concerns of the Buddhist teachings. I hope to have convincingly shown the close connection between *Madhyamaka* and their wider background, namely the conventions of both *vyākaraṇa* and *Abhidharma*..

It is therefore desirable to look for some better rationale for the inclusion of Abhidharmic categories as the fundamental refinement of our conventional language and understanding. Both in the case of Candrakīrti and Prajñākaramati, their remarks about levels of teachings and conventions offer a sensible starting point.

4.4.1 Candrakīrti and graded conventions

Candrakīrti's gradation from falsity to truth may be reconstructed as follows:

mistaken conventions: these are perceptual or inferential errors, including cases of sense impairments or the non-Buddhist doctrines of self;

acceptable worldly conventions as ordinary speech: at this level, one can speak of a person, a self (not in the sense of a permanent core, though), and so on;

acceptable worldly conventions as Abhidharmic analytical categories: here one explicitly recognises the conventionality of the previous level by employing the analysis in terms of *skandhas*, *dhātus*, *āyatanas*, etc.; it counts as a partial understanding of emptiness, at least as selflessness of persons;

ultimate truth; emptiness and the emptiness of emptiness.

Most secondary literature on Candrakīrti does not systematically distinguish between the second and the third levels of this gradation of conventions, and this results in a series of interpretive positions, which I cannot endorse (for example, Williams' statement that a *Prāsaṅgika* 'qua *Prāsaṅgika*' cannot distinguish between different sets of valid conventions). In two passages of the *Prasannapadā* the issue is either explicitly addressed or the different levels are implicitly employed.

4.4.2 Three levels of teachings

In *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 18.6, Nāgārjuna tells us that

The Buddhas spoke of a self, and they also taught no-self.

They also taught that there is neither self, nor no-self whatsoever.²⁷⁴

The translation fails to capture a difference in Nāgārjuna's terminological choice: in the case of 'self', the Sanskrit has *prajñāpitam*, while for the other two (no-self and neither self nor no self) the use is *deśitam*. This stresses that *ātman* is necessarily a *prajñāpti*. This position, as discussed earlier, is endorsed by Candrakīrti elsewhere.²⁷⁵

Candrakīrti offers a very elaborate commentary to the verse, introducing it as part of a series of objections and rebuttals. The question posed by the hypothetical objector is in effect very similar to what we found in the *Abhidharmakośa*'s portion analysed in Chapter 2.3, where 'self' is depicted as a metaphorical usage referring to consciousness.

Here too, the same canonical source (a verse of the *Dhammapāda/Udānavarga*) is quoted. The objector is asking: how are we to accept the non-existence of a 'self', when even the Buddha used the term 'self' while addressing his students.²⁷⁶ On the other hand, in other instances the Buddha has explicitly denied that a self may exist, identical or different from the *skandhas*, and also declared that all *dharma*s are without self (*anātmānaḥ sarvadharmāḥ*). Is it not the case that the Teachings contradict themselves?

²⁷⁴ *ātmetyapi prajñāpitam anātmetyapi deśitam | buddhair nātmā na cānātmā kaścid ityapi deśitam ||*

²⁷⁵ See the section on the status of Rāhu's head and my comments on Eckel's interpretation of the same, earlier in this Chapter.

²⁷⁶ 'One self is one self's protector: who else could be a protector? With a well tamed self, the wise reaches heaven. One self is one self's protector: who else could be a protector? One self is one self's witness, of thing and bad things done.'

ātmā hi ātmano nāthaḥ ko nu nāthaḥ paro bhavet | ātmanā hi sudāntena svargaṃ prāpnoti paṇḍitaḥ || ātmā hi ātmano nāthaḥ ko nu nāthaḥ paro bhavet | ātmā hi ātmanaḥ sākṣī kṛtasyāpakṛtasya ca ||

This is the same verse quoted by Vasubandhu in the *Abhidharmakośa*. Candrakīrti also adds one more quote, from the *Samādhirājasūtra*.

Vasubandhu's solution, as we have seen in Chapter 2, was to say that the Buddha spoke of consciousness as a 'self' only metaphorically, or more aptly put, as a courteous approximation (*upacāra*). Candrakīrti, on the other hand, distinguishes between teachings, whose intended meaning has to be drawn out (*neyārtha*) and those where it has already been drawn out (*nītārtha*). The two ideas are in effect very similar. *Upacāra* is after all an expression, whose actual intended referent must be understood through interpretation: in this sense, it is no different from *neyārtha*.²⁷⁷

Candrakīrti proposes three levels of increasing explicitness in the teachings, suited for three types of audiences, interpreting Nāgārjuna's verse as implying the following gradation:

ātman was taught for those who reduce consciousness to a modification of the physical elements;

anātman was taught for the middling ones, who have a solidified view of a real *ātman* and thus cannot go beyond rebirth, but who have accumulated great merit and eschewed non-virtuous actions;

neither *ātman* nor *anātman* was for the disciples with highest capacities, capable to understand the most profound teachings due to their extraordinary conviction (*adhimuktiviśeṣa*).

To the first type Candrakīrti devotes the greatest part of his comments, as he seemed to regard their mistake to be particularly catastrophic. He gives a

²⁷⁷ This becomes very clear in the *Triṃśikā*: see verse 1, with Sthiramati's commentary.

relatively detailed characterisation of the materialists' position. They consider intellect (*buddhi*) to come about due to a modification (*paripāka*, lit. a 'maturation' or 'fermentation', as in the case of wine) of the elements, occurring during the growth of the embryo. In this way, even while speaking of conventional truth (*vyavahārasatyāvasthitā eva*) these end up denying the next life and the self (*paralokam ātmānam cāpavādante*).²⁷⁸ Because of this denial, they are not interested in a good rebirth or in liberation (*svargāpavargaparaṇimukāḥ*) and, having heaped up negative *karman*, they reach *naraka* (hell, or perhaps more precisely, purgatory).

After a series of adjectives that praise the Buddhas for their great compassion in using the term *ātman* to help the least capable of their audiences (the materialists), Candrakīrti specifies that their position is to be understood as *aHetuvādaḥ*, upholding origination without causes, and tells his readers to refer back to his remarks in the *karmakāraḥaparīkṣā* as well as in the *Madhyamakāvatāra*. This clarifies a very important point: *aHetuvāda* (and *ucchedavāda*) does not necessarily imply the negation of all types of causality. More specifically it has to do with the negation of the causal continuity of *karman* between lives, and therefore with the non-acceptance of the continuation of consciousness at death. Candrakīrti's treatment of the materialist position in this section does not leave much space for ambiguity, since at the same type he describes their views as accepting causality (from the physical elements to *buddhi*) and yet classes them as *aHetuvādins*.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ Incidentally, this is one of the instances where *paraloka* cannot mean anything but the next life (see my remarks on Garfield's translation, above).

²⁷⁹ What this implies is that Garfield's proposed interpretation of *Madhyamaka* would have been understood as a possibility by Candrakīrti, and rejected. Like Garfield, *Cārvākas* too can accept social interaction as a causal process, but not accepting *karman* in the sense of the continuation of consciousness between lives, they fall into a mistaken view of conventions (by reifying the insentient causal elements at play).

The middling disciples are those fit to receive the teachings on no-self. This will serve to counteract their attachment to ‘the view of a self as a real collection’ (*satkāyātmadṛṣṭi*), which Candrakīrti compares to a string (*sūtra*) binding birds who have already gone far – due to their positive actions.

A significant feature of both the valid conventions of ordinary speech (level two) and the valid conventions of *Abhidharma*²⁸⁰ (level three) is that both assert the continuity of *karman*, albeit with a different level of refinement. In the first case, they do so in terms of persons and the agency of persons; while *Ābhidhārmikas* have already dispensed with these rougher identifications – which are open to be taken as ultimate, as the theories of non-Buddhist eternalist (the *śāśvatavāda* of the ‘*Tīrthikas*’).

The fact that the teaching on neither self nor no-self is higher still is explained through a recurrent rationale (in *Madhyamaka* texts):

Just like the view of self is not reality, even the view of no-self, being its counter position, is not reality. In this way it has been taught that there is no self whatsoever, neither there is any no-self whatsoever.²⁸¹

This is a typical *Madhyamaka* distinction between not positing something and positing the opposite of something: it is often applied to existence and non-existence, and has to do with the way *Mādhyamikas* understand and employ

²⁸⁰ In this gradation, I assume that Abhidharmic conventions would necessarily fit the middling disciples. Although Candrakīrti does not say this explicitly, the declared purpose of Abhidharmic analysis is to undo *ātmadṛṣṭi*, and this coincides with Candrakīrti’s depiction of this intermediate teachings.

²⁸¹ *yathaiva hi ātmaadarśanam atattvam evaṃ tatpratipakṣabhūtam api anātamadarśanam naiva tattvam iti | evaṃ nāsty ātmā kaścit na cāpy anātmā kaścid astīti deśitam ||*

For a similar reasoning, see *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.34: ‘When no existence is got, of which one might imagine ‘it is not there’, then, how could a groundless non-existence stand in front of the mind?’ *yadā na labhyate bhāvo yo nāstīti prakalpyate | tadā nirāśrayo bhavaḥ kathañ tiṣṭhen mateḥ puraḥ ||*

prasajya type of negations. What is important here is to stress that, by the same logic, negating no-self does not result in the acceptance of self or in some indecisive stance in respect to self or no-self. It is simply that no-self is understood as a dependent imputation only possible due to positing self in the first place.

The relationship, though, is not perfectly equal – since, as we have seen elsewhere, the *prajñapti* of *ātman* does not depend on the *prajñapti* of its mere absence, but is in reference to the *skandhas*. If this relationship was mutual and on the same plane, there would be no convincing ground to establish a threefold gradation in the teachings, as Candrakīrti does.

The non-acceptance of *karman* can be either part of misconceived conventionality (as *ucchedavāda*) or part of the ultimate view. In the first case, it is a case of positing the absence of *karman*; in the case of ultimate analysis, it would be better described as not positing *karman*. The difference is subtle and touches the core distinction between nihilism (in the specified sense of the Cārvāka's over-denial of conventions) and analysis in terms of emptiness. It is probably part of what Candrakīrti means that, although both *Cārvākas* and *Mādhyamikas* may say that there is no *karman*, they understand *nāsti* ('it is not') in a drastically different way. For *Cārvākas*, in no sense continuity of consciousness after death occurs, but the great elements always exist. For *Mādhyamikas*, in ultimate analysis, there is no question of existence or non-existence, either in the present life or in the next, of either consciousness, or the great elements, or the next life; or the present life for that matter. Their apparently identical expression (*nāsti*) belongs to a very different plane of analysis.

Both the first and the second types of teachings – both self and no-self – are, in Candrakīrti's estimate, conventions. As I have argued, though, they are not *prajñaptis* in the same exact sense: one serves the purpose of rectifying the gross mistakes of materialists, by employing worldly conventions. The teaching on no-self, thus the *Abhidharma*, on the other hand, begins the deconstruction of conventions and is a *prajñapti* functional to the disclosure of *paramārtha*. The difficulty is that the non-positing of a self may easily be taken for the positing of no-self, and since some may not understand it otherwise, the Buddha taught as if assenting to no-self as a position.

The two types of acceptable conventionalities, serve the double purpose of avoiding the two extremes of misinterpreting ultimate analysis as resulting in a *Cārvāka*-like annihilationism (*ucchedavāda*) or of reifying the continuity of *karman* into an eternalist stance (*śāśvatavāda*). In this sense, conventional truths are essential in the project of a middle way, *madhyamā pratipat*. Although it is true that the latter is only perfectly reached with the realisation of the ultimate emptiness of conventions (as well as of emptiness), the extremes find equally expression when the mistake is in terms of conventional truth. The *anta* of *ucchedavāda* is especially insidious, since the reciprocal establishment of intentionality and intentional referents (mental and non-mental events), of object (*artha*) and purpose (*artha*), might be more easily overlooked.²⁸²

²⁸² The gradation presented in the verse and in Candrakīrti's commentary, should be compared to *Ratnāvalī*, 4.94-98: Just like a grammarian would even teach the syllables, the Buddha spoke the Dharma according to the capacity of the trainees (94). To some he spoke a Dharma for turning away from sins; to some, for the sake of accomplishing merit; to some still, one which is based on duality (95), to some, one which is not based on duality, profound, and frightening the timid; to some, one which is the essence of emptiness and compassion, the means to accomplish Buddhahood (96).

*yathaiṣa vaiyākaraṇo mātṛkāṃ api pāṭhayet | buddho 'vadat tathā dharmaṃ vineyānāṃ
yathākṣamaṃ || 94 || keśāṃcid avadaḍ dharmaṃ pāpebhyo vinivṛttaye | keśāṃcit
puṇyasiddhyarthaṃ keśāṃcid ū dvayānīśritam || 95 || dvayānīśritam ekeśāṃ gambhīraṃ
bhūrubhīṣaṇam | śūnyatākaraṇāgarbham ekeśāṃ bodhisādhanaṃ || 96 ||*

4.4.3 Analysing space into emptiness: atoms

While depicting the general gradation just discussed, Candrakīrti does not explicitly employ Abhidharmic analytical categories. He does, though, in the *gatāgataparīkṣā*, the examination of movement. There, commenting on the first verse the *Prasannapadā* shows a gradual analysis in terms of smaller and smaller particles:

(Objection) Or someone may say: for a goer who is going, the area which is traversed by the foot should be ‘that which is presently being gone to’.

(Reply:) It is not so: because the two feet also are conglomerations of atoms. The prior area of the atom placed on the tip of the finger falls within what has been already gone to by him (the goer). The final area of the last atom placed on the heel is included in what has yet to be gone to. And, apart from the atoms, there is no foot: therefore, apart from what has already been gone to and what has yet to be gone to, there is nothing to be gone to in the present time. Moreover, the type of analysis applied to the foot should also be made for the atoms as well, in conjunction to their subdivision into prior and posterior parts.²⁸³

In this passage, we start from conventions of ordinary speech, like feet or fingers, and end up with their emptiness under analysis. The atoms of *Abhidharma* appear in between the analytical process, and thus do absolve a role fairly in tune with Candrakīrti’s more general discussion on their meaning.

Verse 94 contains a possible pun: the word *mātrkā*, here translated as ‘syllable’ can also refer, in a Buddhist context, to mnemonic lists of Abhidharmic items. After learning syllables, though, one does not exactly discard them: they remain basic premises for more complex levels of enunciation and analysis.

²⁸³ *atha syād gantur gacchato yaś caraṇākrānto deśaḥ sa gamyamānaḥ syād iti | naivaṁ
caraṇayor api paramāṇusāṅghātāt | aṅgulyagrāvasthitasya paramāṇor yaḥ pūrvo deśaḥ sa
tasya gate ’ntargataḥ | pārṣṇyavasthitasya caramaparamāṇor ya uttaro deśaḥ sa
tasyāgate ’ntargataḥ | na ca paramāṇuvyatiरेकेṇa caraṇam asti tasmān nāsti
gatāgatavyatiरेकेṇa gamyamānaḥ | yathā caivaṁ caraṇe vicāra evaṁ paramāṇūnām api
pūrvāparadīghāgasambandhena vicāraḥ kārya iti || Prasannapadā 2.1.*

As I argued for the categories of *dhātu*, *skandhas* and so on, the atoms here are analytical tools towards ultimate emptiness (*skandhas* are sometimes explained as the atoms themselves, in fact). In one sense, they are as unreal as the category of self or person: yet they appear more refined, since they can be employed to show that a self or person is not *dravyasat*.

4.4.4 Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati: conventions and momentariness

Centuries separate Candrakīrti from Śāntideva, and the latter from his commentator Prajñākaramati. Nonetheless, the Tibetan tradition grouped all three as *Prāsaṅgikas*, and indeed the similarities between these authors are many.

In the specific instance of graded conventions, Prajñākaramati offers a relatively detailed discussion that could be understood as an expansion of Candrakīrti's scheme, following the same rationale. Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati, though, tell us something more about the role of Abhidharmic conventions (the third level of Candrakīrti's scheme). What they offer is a rather explicit theorisation dealing with the difficult point of Candrakīrti's thought: the proper relationship between the conventions of ordinary speech (the second level) and the valid conventions of *Abhidharma* (the third level).

The *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and its commentary offer reasons to consider the latter superior to ordinary concepts, and I will argue that these reasons are very much in line with the position of the *Prasannapadā*. Moreover, they open up the possibility of refined conventions to comprise of virtually infinite degrees – a

position which would justify a flexible attitude towards different types of *Abhidharma* and accordingly make sense of Candrakīrti's own use of the same.

In the 9th Chapter of *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, Śāntideva is faced with an explicit question about the place of *kṣaṇikatva*:

(Things) are not really momentary. If (you say that) conventionally (they are so, we retort that) this is contradictory.²⁸⁴

To which he replies that

the fault is not with the *yogins*' conventions. Compared to the worldly, they see reality.²⁸⁵

The logic of this reply rests on a subdivision of persons into common persons (*prākṛtaka*) and *yogins*, a subdivision which is set out at the very beginning of Chapter 9, and which rests on whether one realises or not *paramārthasatya* (truth in the highest sense). Yogic perceptions, though, are such precisely because they do not work within the obscuration of conventions, *saṃvṛti*, which is understood etymologically as a covering to *paramārtha*. Strictly speaking, a different understanding of conventions cannot per se be the ground to distinguish common persons from *yogins*: and accordingly, Śāntideva gives

²⁸⁴ *tattvataḥ kṣaṇikā naite saṃvṛtyā ced virudhyate* | *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 9.7a.

²⁸⁵ *na doṣo yogisaṃvṛtyā lokāṭ te tattvadarśinaḥ* | *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, 9.7b. See also Alexander Von Rospatt, *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness*, Stuttgart: Franz Veiner Verlag, 1995, page 200, note 427. I do not here follow his rendering of the third case (*saṃvṛtyā*), although it better fits Prajñākaramati's commentary: '[...] because [it is in fact perceived] by the convention[al experience] of yogins'. Crosby and Skilton's translation is to my eyes equally sensible, and possibly more immediately representative of Śāntideva's verse when read without its commentary. The reason to prefer the latter option is that I believe that reframing cases into new syntactical contexts is no more than a useful commentarial stratagem. It allows the commentator to elucidate some of the implications of the verses, but I do not think it purports to recast the simpler syntactical structures of the root texts themselves.

Von Rospatt briefly discusses this verse in two sections of his work (note 427 and note 451). He points out that the text has not much to say about the actual experience of momentariness, yet I do think that it tells us something of the framework. His remark, moreover, does not apply to the entire commentary, since we do have a section where Prajñākaramati discusses in greater detail the experience of momentariness, while commenting upon 9.78.

their insight into *tattva* – and *not* the different quality of the conventions themselves – as the reason to establish the superiority of *yogisaṃvṛti*. This gradation, and the fundamental epistemological issues that underlie the debate, are better understood from Prajñākaramati's commentary:

Opponent | If they were not taught ultimately, how could they then be momentary? Thus he says: 'They are not momentary'.

In reality (*tattvataḥ*), from the point of view of *paramārtha*, since they have no essence these *dharma*s are not even momentary. The teaching of momentariness and so forth is to show that nature to people to be trained (or, because such nature does not appear to people to be trained).

If ultimately they are not momentary, how is it that even in the teaching they have been said to be so? Placing this in mind he says 'If you say 'conventionally'. If it said that they are called momentary from the point of view of *saṃvṛti*, expecting such an answer he faults it: then 'it is contradictory'. That they are momentary according to *saṃvṛti* and not according to *paramārtha* is contradictory: it does not hold together. Because they are perceived as non-momentary, it contradicts perception. And, since those engaged in conventional usages perceive its opposite, momentariness is not the form corresponding to *saṃvṛti*.²⁸⁶

Common persons do not perceive the world in terms of momentary *dharma*s (nor in terms of the conventions of *Abhidharma* in general, for that matter). *Āryas*, in their realisation of ultimate truths and emptiness, do not perceive conventions: in one sense, their realisation is the non-perception (*anupalambha*) of conventions. Who, then, perceives the world of *Abhidharma*?

²⁸⁶ *yadi na paramārthato deśitāḥ, kathaṃ tarhi te kṣaṇikāḥ ? ity āha – tattvataḥ kṣaṇikā naite iti | tattvataḥ paramārthataḥ niḥsvabhāvatvāt kṣaṇikā api na bhavanti ete ime bhāvāḥ | kṣaṇikādeśanā vaineṣyānāṃ tatsvabhāvatāprakāśanāt | yadi na tattvataḥ kṣaṇikāḥ kathaṃ tarhi deśanāyām api kathitāḥ ? iti manasi nidhāya āha – saṃvṛtyā cet iti | yadi saṃvṛtyā kṣaṇikā abhidhīyanta ity ucyate ity uttaram āśankya dūṣayati – tadā virudhyate | saṃvṛtyā kṣaṇikāḥ na paramārthataḥ iti virudhyate na saṅgacchate | akṣaṇikatayā pratīteḥ pratītiṣirodhaḥ sāmīvyavahāribhir akṣaṇikatvapratīteḥ na kṣaṇikatvaṃ sāmīvṛtāṃ rūpaṃ iti yāvāt || Pañjikā on 9.7.*

Both this question, and the answer which follows, suggest that Candrakīrti and Prajñākaramati tackled the same issues from two distinct (although by no means contradictory) perspectives. Candrakīrti's emphasis was in placing different levels of conventions in a pedagogical gradation, which avoids the pitfalls of two avowed extremes. Although this aspect is present in Prajñākaramati's discussion, the emphasis is elsewhere, as his discussion is predominantly framed from an epistemological angle.

The commentator emphasises Śāntideva's category of *yogisaṃvṛti*. This is an important idea, not elaborated upon (as far as I know) by Candrakīrti. Although Prajñākaramati does not use the term, his mention of meditative absorption (*samādhi*) suggests that we are here dealing with *prṣṭhalabdhajñāna*, the cognition of the world one obtains after coming out of meditative absorption, and which differs from the cognition that one would have without having ever entered *samādhi*. It is this type of post-meditative cognition, which corresponds to the category of *yogisaṃvṛti*:

The fault is not with the *yogins'* *saṃvṛti*.

Here there is no such flaw as a contradiction to perception. Why? Because, according to the *saṃvṛti* or conventional usage of *yogins* who have obtained *samādhi* in the selflessness of persons, there is perception in terms of momentariness.

This is what is intended: although momentariness is not perceived by the short-sighted, it is nonetheless within the scope of the *yogins'* conventional usage. Even the conventional usage of *yogis* does not escape having the nature of *saṃvṛti*, since it has been said that 'the intellect is called *saṃvṛti*' (9.2). And it is not that what is stultified

by perception is surely stultified, since a certain type of perception does not constitute a valid means.²⁸⁷

The type of cognition alluded to in this passage is what Candrakīrti never seems to discuss: he either speaks in terms of the *Āryas*' realisation of ultimate truth, or in terms of the common persons' conventions. In one instance (criticising the *svalakṣaṇa*) he goes on to say that something that does not fit in either perception fits nowhere. However, Candrakīrti is there more specifically stating that *svalakṣaṇa* contradicts the very logic which allows for conventions to exist – he is not merely saying that it does not exist, because it is not perceived by commoners. His silence does not necessarily militate against his acceptance of a difference between meditative and post-meditative cognitions: denying such difference seems hardly plausible in a Buddhist context. However, even traditional Tibetan scholars have characterised Candrakīrti as mainly concerned with meditative absorption into emptiness.²⁸⁸ Prajñākaramati, on the other hand, following Śāntideva, points out that even those who realise emptiness still need to engage with conventions, although their engagement has been transformed:

Even the conventional usage of yogis does not escape having the nature of *saṃvṛti*, since it has been said that 'the intellect is called *saṃvṛti*' (9.2). And it is not that what is stultified by perception is surely stultified, since a certain type of perception does not constitute a valid means.

²⁸⁷ *Na doṣo yogisaṃvṛtyā || nāyaṃ pratītivirodhalakṣaṇo doṣaḥ | kutaḥ ? yogināṃ pudgalanairātmyasamādhiābhīnāṃ yā saṃvṛtir vyavahāraḥ, tayā kṣaṇikatayā pratīteḥ | ayam abhiprāyaḥ – yadi nāma arvāgdarśanaḥ kṣaṇikatvaṃ na pratīyate, tathāpi yogivyavahāragocaraḥ||*

²⁸⁸ 'Ju Mipham Rinpoche, for example, identified the different emphasis on the jñāna obtained in samādhi as the main difference between Candrakīrti's and Śāntarakṣita's systems. See Georges B.J. Dreyfus, 'Would the True Prāsaṅgika Please Stand? The Case and View of 'Ju Mipham', in Georges B.J. Dreyfus and Sara L. McClintock (eds.), *The Svatantrika-Prasaṅgika Distinction*, Boston: Wisdom, 2003, pages 317-347.

Opponent | Then, how is it that, although it corresponds to *saṃvṛti*, only *yogins* see this, while the short-sighted don't?

Reply | Thus he says: 'compared to the other person, they see *tattva*'. In comparison to the other person, who is short-sighted, those *yogins* see *tattva*, see beyond the sense faculties. Such expression gives the reason. Because, they see *tattva*, therefore they understand momentariness, selflessness and so forth, even though those are not perceived by other people. Hence, the perception of the other persons does not stultify them.²⁸⁹

This last argument has to be carefully analysed, least it may be taken to involve circularity. Momentariness, selflessness and so forth are analytical tools, which go towards the complete analysis in terms of ultimate emptiness. If these tools are the manner through which one comes to understand emptiness, how can the understanding of emptiness be an *a priori* condition of their conventional validity? If the argument were to be taken in this way, I doubt it would carry much force.

To solve this circularity, we may appeal to the distinction between the two types of selflessness: selflessness of persons (*pudgalanairātmya*) and selflessness of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*). Abhidharmic conventions are valid analysis in terms of the emptiness of persons, and therefore are not mistaken in reference of the absence of an ultimate *pudgala*: to this level belongs momentariness, selflessness and so on. They do not extend the analysis to all the referents in play, though, and as such they present an incomplete view of emptiness. Yet,

²⁸⁹ *yogivyavahāro 'pi saṃvṛtirūpatām na jahāti 'buddhiḥ saṃvṛtir ucyate' (9.2) iti vacanāt | na ca pratītibādhitam bādhitam eva, tathāvidhāyāḥ pratīter apramāṇatvāt | Lokāt te tattvadarśinaḥ | kutaḥ punar etat saṃvṛtam api kṣaṇikatvādi yogina eva paśyanti nārvāgdarśinaḥ ? ity āha – lokāt te tattvadarśina ity | lokād arvacīnadarśanāt sakāśāt te yoginas tattvadarśinaḥ atīndryadarśinaḥ | hetupadam etat | yasmāt tattvadarśinas te tasmāt kṣaṇikatvanairātmyādi lokāpratītiḥ | ata eva na teṣāṃ lokapratītibādhā ||*

emptiness is present in the *yogin's* conventions (even when the *yogin* perceives momentary *dharma*s) at least in the sense of the emptiness of persons.

Even among *yogins*, there can be levels of insight and accordingly manifold conventionalities. Śāntideva points this out by saying that *yogins* with sharper intelligence refute other *yogins*.²⁹⁰ 'Sharper intelligence', as the commentator explains it, refers to the degree of realisation, such as being on the various Bodhisattva levels (*bhūmi*) or having attained any of the levels of meditation (*dhyāna*).²⁹¹ The difference, though, is only one of degree, in so far as any intellectual imputation is mere convention. It could nevertheless be said that certain conventions go towards their own dissolution, and this is hinted at by Prajñākaramati, when he defines the *yogins* as having attained the *samādhi* of selflessness of persons (*pudgalanairātmya*). The specification *pudgala* necessarily implies that they have on the other hand *not* reached the *samādhi* of selflessness of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*). The first degree of attainment comes through such teachings as the ones on momentariness, which is also their resultant view.²⁹² The view of momentariness is therefore closer to the dissolution of all views than a view of permanence would be, since the latter is no dissolution at all. As I mentioned Prajñākaramati also defines *saṃvṛti* as 'covering', in the sense of a veil which precludes direct 'seeing' of ultimate

²⁹⁰ *bādhyante dhīviśeṣena yogino 'pyuttarottaraiḥ* || 9.4.

²⁹¹ In brief, I suggest that Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati have indeed taken into serious consideration the question of many levels of conventionalities. Williams (1998) points out that the category of intermediate conventionalities is one 'which the Prasangika has rather tended to ignore'. See Paul Williams, *The Reflexive Nature of Awareness: A Tibetan Madhyamaka Defence*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000 page 43, note 3). Although this might be generally true (in the sense of having less interest for Abhidharmic phenomenology, I feel that Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati have in fact addressed the issue rather directly.

²⁹² This is not contradictory, if we consider the continuity from *śrutimayī prajñā*, to *cintāmayī*, to *bhāvanāmayī*: wisdom from hearing, pondering and cultivation. The content of the three may be the same, but it has to become increasingly clear and stabilised. The link between the understanding of selflessness of persons and momentariness is also brought out in Prajñākaramati's commentary to 9.78.

truth: we could say that the veil is thicker in the commoner's case than in the *yogin's*.

Śāntideva points out an unwanted consequence (*prasaṅga*) that would follow the rejection of his arguments.²⁹³ The opponent should accept that *yogins* have a greater insight into *tattva* than commoners, or accept that a woman's body cannot be depicted as impure. Since, if common people's insight were as good as the *yogin's*, their desire for women would stultify any deconstruction of beauty into a heap of bodily impurities. Śāntideva's argument suggests that he is here referring implicitly to the four erroneous views (or perversions, *viparyāsa*): imputing permanence to the impermanent (*nityānityaviparyāsa*) purity to the impure (*śubhāśubhaviparyāsa*) pleasure to the painful (*sukhaduḥkhaviparyāsa*) and self to the selfless (*ātmānātmaviparyāsa*).²⁹⁴ This implies that the opponent is none other than a Buddhist – since the force of the argument rests on the acceptance of the four *viparyāsas* as erroneous.

The reference to the *viparyāsas* may help to clarify the relationship between teachings which use definitions and those employing emptiness. Both are aimed at eradicating bondage, which, it is agreed, comes from attachment, hatred and delusion (*rāga*, *dveṣa* and *moha*). They operate, though, in a different way. If we take the instance of attachment, the teaching on impurity shows the hollowness of *desirability*. The object of attachment is not, as such, being refuted, but the reasons for our attachment are.

²⁹³ Incidentally, it is worth noticing that here the device of *prasaṅga* is *not* used simply to refute the opponents view, but to establish one's own.

²⁹⁴ In fact in verse six, the expression 'towards the impure, etc.' (*aśucy-ādiṣu*) is glossed by Prajñākaramatī as referring to the other erroneous views as well: 'By the word 'etc.' the intellection of permanence, etc., in reference of what is impermanent etc., is included.' *ādiśabdād anityādau nityādibuddhir grhyate ||*

The teaching of emptiness, on the other hand, directly refutes the existence of *the desired object*. This should undermine the possibility of finding reasons for attachment at the very outset.²⁹⁵ We may think that the first level of teaching should be sufficient to eradicate attachment, since we may believe in the existence of something and yet have no attachment towards it. Śāntideva responds that the teaching on emptiness is necessary, since only when any possible object of imputation is removed, we will have forever uprooted the possibility of delusions. Although there is a difference of degree between imputing desirability and imputing mere existence, any imputation is, as such, erroneous and structurally similar.

The aim is to take away any mental support, or point of reference (*ālambana*), since, 'A mind with supports will get stuck here or there'.²⁹⁶ The first level of teaching only removes intentionality towards the idea of beauty, but the imputation of existence remains, which is the necessary ground for any other imputation (and possibly, it is also a tendency towards it). While at first the conceptions *about* an object are removed, then the very conception *of* an object ought to be dissolved.

We may fit momentariness into a similar scheme. While the meditation on impurity (*aśucibhāvanā*) removes the mental flaw of attachment, momentariness helps removing the erroneous imputation of permanence and personal self. It shows that objects are impermanent, but it does not refute the existence of an ever-changing continuum of momentary events (*kṣaṇasantatī*).

²⁹⁵ The effect of the understanding of emptiness upon desire is taken up in verse 32 and commentary, responding to the objection that even a magician is enthralled by his empty creations.

²⁹⁶ *sāmbanena cittena sthātavyam yatra tatra vā*, 9.48.

An analysis of its constituent elements will deconstruct even this, so that no basis of imputation for permanence or its opposite may remain.

In other words, momentariness comes as a stepping-stone from a solidified view of reality, to the complete dissolution of intellectual imputations. It corresponds to a limited (but correct) perception of selflessness. It is limited, since it does not apply to the elements into which the person is analysed. It is correct, since it

ascertain the absence of a self among those elements.²⁹⁷ What is here discussed in reference to momentariness, could be generalised to Abhidharmic conventions as a whole.

A more precise rationale to establish a relationship between the realisation of selflessness of persons and the conventional perception of momentariness is given in Prajñākaramati's commentary to 9.78. This verse introduces the actual meditation on selflessness, and the commentator encases the verse in an explanation of its specific role towards liberation. Prajñākaramati understands Śāntideva as implying that, although meditation on the selflessness of persons still rests on some view of grasping and it should be ultimately abandoned (*paścāt punar iyaṃ api prahāsyate upalambhaḍṣṭivāt*) it may be accepted for some time (*tāvat kālam astu*) for the sake of removing attachment to a sense of egotism (*ahaṃkāra*). Apart from this broader statement about its specific role as a stepping stone, which is in line with Candrakīrti's own view and adds something unspecified in the previous sections of Prajñākaramati's commentary,

²⁹⁷ Compare Von Rospatt's remarks on the role of momentariness in the *Paramārthagāthās*: '[...]the doctrine of momentariness serves in the *Paramārthagāthās* as an instrument that decomposes the seeming unit constituted by a sentient being in a succession of discrete entities or events, and thereby stresses the non-existence of a Self. Insofar as this approach is also adopted with respect to conditioned entities in general [...], the doctrine of momentariness is used to dissolve the existence of all things as they are ordinarily perceived by reducing them to a succession of momentary entities which can ultimately be reduced to acts of origination. In this sense, the doctrine of momentariness undermines the substantial existence of phenomena, though without effacing them completely'. See Alexander Von Rospatt, *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness*, Stuttgart: Franz Veiner Verlag, 1995, page 81, 82.

the most interesting remarks are those which clarify the link between momentariness and selflessness of persons:

It is as follows: due to having reached the excellent limit of its cultivation, as there is a direct vision of selflessness, its contrary, the vision of a true collection, ceases. When the latter has ceased, moreover, because one does not any more see something identical, that may continue, there is the vision of a mere instant devoid of prior or subsequent forms. Then, due to the absence of a superimposition of what is prior or subsequent, one does see any possible means to achieve future happiness for oneself. Hence, no attachment is born towards any object of such a means, nor is there aversion towards something contrary to that, simply due to the absence of attachment.²⁹⁸

Although the expression *bhāvanāprakarṣaparyanta* may remind one of Dharmakīrti's own system, the sequence of cultivation is here perhaps different. One does not start by inferring momentariness through correct reasoning, to then meditate on that ascertainment: the actual meditation to be done is directly on selflessness, and is to be described in the immediately subsequent sections. According to Prajñākaramati, though, seeing momentariness is the direct result of cultivating selflessness of persons (again, not *viceversa*), and he offers a

²⁹⁸ *lathāhi tadbhāvanāprakarṣaparyantagamanāt sākṣān nairātmyadarśanāt virodhi satkāyadarśanaṁ nivartate | tannivṛttau ca ekasyānugāmino darśanābhāvāt pūrvāpararūpavikalasya kṣaṇamātrasya darśanam | tataḥ pūrvāparasamāropābhāvāt na anāgatasukhasādhanaṁ kiñcid ātmanaḥ paśyati | tato na tasya kvacid viṣaye rāgo jāyate nāpi tatpratīvirodhini dveṣaḥ āsaṅgābhāvād eva || Pañjikā on 9.78.*

The text continues: *nāpy a(pa*)kāriṇaṁ prati apakārasthānaṁ paśyati | yena yasmin kṛto 'pakāraḥ tayor dvayor api dvitīyakṣaṇe 'bhāvāt | na ca anyena kṛte 'pakāre prekṣāvataḥ anyatra vairaniryātaṁ ucita nāpi yasya kṛtas tenāpi | evaṁ rāgādinivṛttau anye 'pi tatprabhavāḥ kleśopakleśā noṭpadyante | nāpi vāstutaḥ kaścit kasyacid upakārī idaṁ pratītya idam utpadyate iti pratītyasamutpādadarśanād vā | evaṁ hi pudgalaśūnyatāyāṁ satkāyadarśananivṛttau chinnamūlatvāt kleśā na samudācaranti | tadyathāpi nāma śāntamate vṛkṣasya mūlacchinnaṁ sarvaśākhāpatrapalāśaṁ śuśyati evaṁ eva śāntamate satkāyadrṣṭipraśamāt sarvakeśā upaśāmyantīti | tasmād varāṁ nairātmyabhāvanā || Pañjikā on 9.78. Compare this also with Nāgārjuna's *Pratītyasamutpādayakārikāvyaḥyāna* on verse 5.*

* Although Vaidya gives *akāriṇaṁ*, the Bauddhabhāratī edition gives *apakāriṇaṁ*, which makes better sense.

rationale in that respect: the untrained do not see the mere instants, because they are used to impute upon them what is actually prior or subsequent: due to the habit of imputing an enduring element. Once it is ascertained that there is no self (or rather, when that is directly 'seen'), the mere instants are free to be perceived without any additional imputations. This reasoning is quite coherent with Prajñākaramati's commentary on 9.7, discussed above.

4.5 Conclusions

This Chapter proposed to look at *Madhyamaka*'s stance on conventions and analysis within a more refined scheme, and against a wider background. This may open up certain possibilities, in terms of *Madhyamaka*'s relation to and employment of other aspects of Buddhist thought. It may also preclude other avenues, as it does not facilitate the assimilation of *Madhyamaka* to a method easily divorced from a specific context of application (and hence, easily exportable).²⁹⁹

In other words, the 'method' of *Madhyamaka* is not merely a series of typical argumentative structures, easily distinguished from the specific concerns, referents, and context of application of the system as a whole. There is also a definite relation between argumentative structures and content: between analysis in terms of emptiness, and the use of Abhidharmic categories, or between the acceptance of continued birth and the dialectic of cognition and objects of knowledge; and so forth.

²⁹⁹ Even an early scholar of *Madhyamaka* like Murti, through that ease of 'exportability' was a great asset of *Madhyamaka*, that, for instance, distinguished it from *Advaita*. See TRV Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Madhyamika System*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955. In some ways, I believe that Garfield continues in the same vein. In Garfield's case, if I understand his stance, this tendency may stem from his broader thesis about Buddhism being somewhat at odds with Indian culture as a whole. I would rather argue that Buddhism is one of the forming elements of South Asian culture; and one of the most important for that matter.

Chapter 5

Comparisons with the *Yogācāra*

Some of the differences between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra* have been pointed out in the context of debates found within *Madhyamaka* texts. I now intend to look back at some of the main themes of the previous two Chapters, and reconstruct their relevance within the *Yogācāra* system. The relationship of *Yogācāra* to *Abhidharma*, and thus to *lakṣaṇas*, will be treated first: the subsequent section will discuss *kāraṇas*. The order is not identical to the manner in which the topics were presented in the case of *Madhyamaka*, as I understand *Yogācāra* taking a different starting point.

The main arguments of the *Yogācāra* may be understood in Abhidharmic terms. They regard a thesis about the origin and cause of the universe, and propose to give a more refined set of *lakṣaṇas* that would analyse it: *Yogācāra Abhidharma* has the longest list of *dharma*s (one hundred). Secondly, *Yogācāra* understands what constitutes consciousness differently from other *Abhidharma*s: and this is linked to their usage of the *kāraṇa* system.

The first point is exemplified by Vasubandhu's Twenty Verses, which are often taken as the quintessential delineation of the *Yogācāra* view. I will therefore first offer a reading of that treatise.

5.1 Twenty Verses: *viññaptimātratā* as an Abhidharmic argument

The relation between *Yogācāra* and the *Abhidharma* can be easily distinguished from the *Madhyamaka* position: while *Madhyamaka* discusses *Abhidharma* and its proper place, *Yogācāra*, in one sense, is *Abhidharma*.

We have at least two texts in that tradition, which are, unmistakably, Abhidharmic treatises: the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* (and its *bhāṣya*) and Vasubandhu's *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*. Besides these, the *Madhyāntavibhāṅga* can itself be read as an Abhidharmic text (Sthiramati brings out some structural similarity between the first chapter and the first section of the *Abhidharmakośa*). In the case of the Twenty Verses, I will try to argue that they present a specifically Abhidharmic argument.

5.1.1 The main thesis of Verse 1

The common manner to render Vasubandhu's first verse of the Twenty suggests a syllogistic structure. In the language of Indian logicians, it would comprise of a *pratijñā* or thesis, a *hetu* or logical ground, and a *dṛṣṭānta* or example:

all of this is perception-only (*viññapti-mātram eva idam*) - *pratijñā*;
because of the appearance of a false object (*asad-artha-avabhāsanāt*) - *hetu*;
like when someone with an optical disorder sees nets of hair, etc. (*yadvat taimirikasya asat-keśa-uṇḍuka-ādi-darśanam*) - *dṛṣṭānta*.

Pande explicates the assumption³⁰⁰, and most translators' choices imply it³⁰¹. This reading is also suggested by the title of the work (*vijñapti-mātratā-siddhiḥ*), since it gives an apt beginning for a work bent on establishing perception-only. This argument could be further simplified as: there is only cognition; because, there is no object; as in an optical illusion.

It may be argued that, if Vasubandhu would have intended the verse to be read as such, the stress should have been on the falsity (*asattvāt*) and not on the appearance (*avabhāsanāt*). This is logically more cogent. It would make more sense to say that the world is mere perception because what appears *is false*, rather than say that it is mere perception because a false object *appears*. This table is empty, because there is no banana; rather than, this table is empty, because a false banana appears. The second phrasing is perhaps hardly an argument.

Yet, we can understand the argument as implying that: all of this is mere cognition, because there is the appearance of a false object, as opposed to the appearance of a real object. Since the appearance is a qualified appearance, in other words, it does work as a logical ground.

³⁰⁰ G.C. Pande, *Studies in Mahāyāna*, Sarnath: CIHTS, 1993, pag. 115: 'The first Kārikā is, in fact, a syllogism'.

³⁰¹ K.N. Chatterje, (tr.), *Vijñaptimātratā-siddhiḥ*, Varanasi: Kishor Vidya Niketan, 1980: 'It is all mere ideation because the non-existing things appear as seemingly external objects as persons having bad eyes see non-real hair, texture and the like'. T.A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982: 'It is all mere representation of consciousness, because there is the appearance of non-existent objects'. S. Anacker, *Seven Works of Vasubandhu*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, page 161: 'All this is perception only, because of the appearance of non-existent objects'. T.R.Sharma, *Vijñaptimātratā-siddhi (viñśatikā) (With Introduction, Translation and Commentary)*, Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1993, page 61: 'On account of the appearances of non-existent objects, it is all mere consciousness only, just like hairs, moons, etc. (which do not exist in reality) to a man with a cataract (in his eye)'. Jay L. Garfield *Empty words: Buddhist philosophy and cross-cultural interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, page 157: 'All this is appearance only, because of the appearance of the non-existent. Just someone with cataracts sees hairs, the moon and other non-existents.'

Vasubandhu's introductory comments refer to a *Sūtra* passage where it is stated that: 'It is mind-only, Sons of the Victors: the three world-spheres'.³⁰² Vasubandhu then explains that mind and cognition (*citta* and *viññapti*) are synonyms. The purpose of such a remark is plausibly to indicate that his initial statement of mere cognition (*viññaptimātra*) is identical to the *Sūtra*'s statement of mind-only (*cittamātra*).

Kochumuttom argued that the word *traidhātukam* does not mean 'the three worlds' but its derivatives: only mind and mentations (*citta* and *caitāsikas*) would then fall within the scope of *viññapti-mātratā*, while the elements themselves (*bhūtas*) are left untouched. In Kochumuttom's own words:

'traidhātuka, is an adjective meaning 'belonging to the three worlds'
[...] it is not a substantive meaning 'the three worlds'.³⁰³

This distinction is indeed crucial in formulating his interpretation of *Yogācāra*, in the lines of a realistic pluralism. The specification is not at all convincing. In favour of Kochumuttom's argument, one could indeed quote several instances where *traidhātuka* is used as an adjective: but in these instances the qualified noun is also present, at least once. As an example, the *Abhidharmapradīpa* has '*traidhātukam āyuh*'³⁰⁴ as well as '*traidhātukāḥ dharmāḥ*'³⁰⁵. The same text, though, uses the term as a noun, referring to the Buddhist 'worlds'.³⁰⁶ If we

³⁰² *cittamātram bho jinaputrā yaduta traidhātukam* || He introduces this quote with the comment that 'In the *Mahāyāna* the three World-Spheres are established to be cognition only' (*mahāyāne traidhātukam viññaptimātram vyavasthāpyate*).

³⁰³ T.A. Kochumuttom, *A Buddhist Doctrine of Experience*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1982, page 166.

³⁰⁴ *Abhidharmapradīpa*, page 17.

³⁰⁵ *traidhātukāḥ duḥkhasamudayaadarśaṇa(na)heyā bhāvanāheyāś ca dharmā uktāḥ* || *Abhidharmapradīpa*, page 285.

look at Yaśomitra's usage in his *vyākhyā*, *traidhātukam* is used to gloss *samsāra*³⁰⁷, in the sense of the place where living beings are reborn - the *bhajanaloka* as opposed to the *sattvaloka*. It is clear that this must include the objective elements of existence - in fact, that they are precisely being referred to. When *Mahāyāna Sūtras* use the term *traidhātuka*, it seems likely that they refer to the three worlds, not to *citta* and *caitāsikas*³⁰⁸: and Vasubandhu's usage is probably a quote from a *Mahāyāna Sūtra*. In all these instances, *traidhātukam* seems to be in the neuter gender and in isolation: no qualified noun is found.³⁰⁹ Or, if *traidhātuka* is the first member of a compound, the relationship is not *karmadhāraya*. In Vasubandhu's text too the term appears in isolation, and it is thus more plausible to read it as a substantive, not as a qualifier.³¹⁰

Some attempts to differentiate Vasubandhu's system from Asaṅga's *viññāna-vāda* have focused on the use of *viññapti* versus *viññāna* in the Twenty Verses. To support this distinction, Wayman suggests that the introductory commentarial portion might be an interpolation, though the philological grounds of his decision are far from conclusive. The disputed section (preserved in

³⁰⁶ *trayo'nabhidhyā'vyūpādasamyagdr̥ṣṭayaḥ sarvatra traidhātuke pañcasv api gatiṣu dvābhyāṃ prakārābhyāṃ santīti* || *Abhidharmapradīpa*, page 173.

³⁰⁷ *samsaranty asmin sattvā iti saṃsāraḥ = traidhātukam* || Yaśomitra's commentary to *Abhidharmakośa* 1.1. This can only refer to the *bhajanaloka*, the 'receptacle world', since *sattvaloka* is explicitly used to gloss *jagat* of the same verse: *jagat sattvalokaḥ*.

³⁰⁸ See for example, the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*, page 59: *ahyavasitā hy amī sattvāḥ pañcasu kāmagaṇeṣu traidhātukaratyāṃ aparimuktā* [...]; page 60: *ta ucyante śrāvakayānam ākāṅkṣamāṇās traidhātukān nirdhāvanti* [...]; page 67, verse 85: *putrāś ca te prāṇina sarvi mahyaṃ traidhātuke kāmavilagna bālāḥ* ||

³⁰⁹ See also the term *traidhāyukavītarāga*, as employed in *Divyāvadāna*, page 18: *arhan saṃvṛttas traidhātukavītarāgo* [...], and page 97: *muṇḍāḥ saṃvṛttās traidhātukavītarāgāḥ samaloṣṭakāñcanā ākāśapāṇitalasamacittā vāsīcandanakalpā* [...]. In both instances, the sense of *traidhātukam* proposed by Kochumuttom seems hardly applicable.

³¹⁰ Paul Griffiths already pointed out that Kochumuttom's understanding of the term is 'wrong'. See Paul J. Griffiths, *On being mindless. Buddhist meditation and the mind-body problem*, Open Court Publishing Company, 1986.

Tibetan) contains a *Sūtra* passage, and the Sanskrit equivalent identifies *citta*, *viññāna* and *viññapti*. I may agree in taking these as merely partial synonyms: but the set of identifications undermines the force of Wayman's argument.³¹¹

The common usage of *viññapti* is close to 'intimation', something which 'makes known'. This is its dictionary meaning referring to a non-technical usage outside of specifically Buddhist contexts. It is therefore more sensible to look at its usages within the tradition that the Twenty Verses show closest affinity and continuity with. As pointed out by King, *viññapti* is an Abhidharmic term.³¹²

In the *Abhidharmakośa*, *viññapti* is used in two different contexts, either meaning 'informative action' or, as a synonym of consciousness (*viññāna*). The first sense refers to instances of bodily or vocal actions, which have a quality of 'making known' akin to the common usage of the term outside of Buddhist contexts. *Viññapti* of this type falls within form or materiality (*rūpa*): it is not something mental.³¹³

Viññapti as used in *Yogācāra*, though, has often been translated as 'perception'. This is justified by its other usage within the *Abhidharmakośa*, which defines *viññāna* as *prativijñapti*. When, moreover, the compound *prati-viññapti* is split into its component parts, the *Bhāṣya* glosses *viññapti* itself as apprehension or perception (*upalabdhi*).³¹⁴ This does not support the reading of any significant

³¹¹ See the essay on Vasubandhu in: Alex Wayman, *Untying the Knots in Buddhism: Selected Essays*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1997. For a criticism of Wayman's general stance on *Yogācāra* in relation to the *Sandhinirmocanasūtra* see also John Powers (tr.), *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on Just the Maitreya Chapter from the Sandhinirmocana-Sūtra*, Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research, 1998, pages 7-8.

³¹² Richard King, 'Viññaptimātratā and the Abhidharma context of early *Yogācāra*', in *Asian Philosophy*, Vol. 8 No. 1 Mar. 1998 pp. 5-18.

³¹³ For a discussion of *viññapti* in the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* see 4.2-6 and commentary.

difference between *viññapti* and *viññāna*: as the *Bhāṣya* (most likely by the same author as the Twenty Verses, in fact) openly identifies them.

Between these two meanings, the second better fits the context of the Twenty Verses: as we have seen, the initial section of the text openly identifies *viññāna* and *viññapti*, just as the *Kośa* did. This identification would not work if we took *viññapti* in its other technical sense of ‘informative action’, since informative action is materiality and not consciousness. If on the other hand Vasubandhu intended to employ the term *viññapti* in a completely idiosyncratic way, it is hard to understand why he *never* decided to specify its sense: hence interpreting *viññapti* as distinguishable from *viññāna* remains highly speculative.

I do agree, as I believe to have made clear, that the characterisation of Asaṅga’s and Vasubandhu’s view as idealist is plausible, and would endorse most of Garfield’s arguments on this point.³¹⁵ This is also on terminological grounds.

The main thrust of the argument, thus, implies that perceptions (*viññaptis*) certify no more than themselves. They are not true representations: they may be called so only in the sense that an actor might represent a character that never was or will be a presence beyond the stage.

5.1.2 An alternative translation

The first two quarters of verse 1, have been usually read as separate sentences. It is grammatically justifiable, though, to join them, so that the overall sense

³¹⁴ *viṣayaṃ viṣayaṃ prati viññaptir upalabdhir viññānaskandha ity ucyate* | *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* on 1.16a.

³¹⁵ See Jay L. Garfield, *Empty words: Buddhist philosophy and cross-cultural interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, pages 155-159, ‘Cittamātra is idealism’.

would be that: 'All of this mere-perception comes from the appearance of a false object, like', etc.

I am suggesting that, if one had to supply a verb to the sentence, *utpadyate* (arises) could be used instead of *bhavati* (is), and this would give an alternative translation:

All this mere-perception arises from the appearance of a false object, just like the seeing of false nets of hair, etc., on the part of someone affected by an eye-disease, arises from the appearance of a false object.³¹⁶

In this rendering, to the statement of perception-only is added a depiction of its origin; and the second quarter is no more, strictly speaking, the logical ground of a three-member syllogistic figure.

³¹⁶ Corresponding to the hypothetical Sanskrit expansion as: **viññaptimātram evedam asadārvābhāsanāt utpadyate, yadvat taimirikasyāpy asatkeṣaṇḍukādidarśanam asadārvābhāsanāt utpadyate* | Even retaining *bhavati* would make little difference, as the root *bhū* is not necessarily to be taken as a copula, and can carry the sense of 'to come into existence'. Yet, *utpadyate* clarifies the sense in which I understand the verse.

When we look at the origin of *viññaptis*, we see that the second quarter of the verse consists of a compound with some interpretive options. We may either understand it as 'from the false appearance of an object' or as 'from the appearance of a false object', depending on whether we refer *asat* to *artha* or *avabhāsanāt*. The second reading is preferable, as we can thus retain the sense of non-existent, and not merely deceiving, for the word *asat* (which we rendered with false). This is also the standard translation.

The example may also be understood differently. Since the position that the seeing of false nets of hair arises from a false appearance is not immediately acceptable to the hypothetical realist opponent (who might prefer to ascribe its origin to defects in objectively existent phenomena), the example is fit to explain the characteristics of perception-only, rather than its arising. If we want to shift the referents of the simile, we may rephrase the translation, as

This, which is mere perception-only, originates from the appearance of a non-existent object, and is like the seeing of non-existent nets of hair, etc., on the part of one with an ophthalmic disease.

We can also read the objection in verse 2 as directed to the origin of perception, not to the first half as a statement of perception-only:

[...] if perception does not come from an object.³¹⁷

A passage from Sthiramati's *Madhyāntavibhāṅgabhāṣyaṭīkā* suggests that this is how the commentator understood this verse. This passage comes close, in structure and content, to being its paraphrase. The use of 'it is said' (*ucyate*) suggests that it was perhaps intended as a quote:

[...] therefore, in order to make one relinquish attachment to that, it is said: this consciousness-only arises as the appearance of an object, etc., just like for those with an optical disease the appearance of nets of hair, etc., even without an object, a being, etc.. In this way the dependent imagination of what does not exist, consisting of eight consciousnesses, has been mentioned.³¹⁸

The symmetry with Vasubandhu's verse is hard to miss: similar or identical expressions occur even in the same order (*evedam, arthādyābhāsam, taimirikāṇām, keṣoṇḍukādi*). Sthiramati supplies *utpadyate*, and not *bhavati*, as the verb fit to complete Vasubandhu's sentence, and reads it as a reference to the dependent nature (*paratantrasvabhāva*). In this reading, the verse has an indirect reference to how the dependent nature operates.³¹⁹

³¹⁷ *vijñaptir yadi nārthataḥ* | The second half of the verse now fits with the rest quite well: seeing nets of hair also comes from the appearance of such false objects. The similarity between the example and the exemplified is explicitly attacked in the commentary to verse two, by the hypothetical objector: this suggests that it was expressed in the initial thesis.

³¹⁸ [...] *tasmāt tadabhiniveśatyājanārtham ucyate - vijñānam evedam arthādyābhāsam utpadyate, taimirikāṇām iva keṣoṇḍukādyābhāsam vināpy arthasattvādineti | evaṁ cāṣṭavijñānavastukaḥ paratanthro'bhūtaparikalpa ity uktam bhavati* ||
Madhyāntavibhāṅgabhāṣyaṭīkā, page 15 in Pandeya's edition. I read *artha* and *sattva* as a *dvanda* and not as a *tatpuruṣa*, partly because of the occurrence of *ādi*, but mainly because this type of interpretation is in line with the way Vasubandhu reads the fourth *Kārikā* (*artha-sattva*, etc.). I think that this is also the sense in which *artha-sattva-pratibhāsam* is used in the *ṭīkā*, page 12.

³¹⁹ One could object that saying that the seeing of false nets of hair *arises* from a false appearance of objects is neither clear nor, perhaps, cogent – since, in one sense, the misapprehension is fitter to exemplify what a false appearance *is*. Yet, the cognition of false nets

I find both readings plausible, for different reasons. The first seems more in tune with taking the verse as a gloss to the *Sūtra*'s statement, which it could not be if the first quarter (*viññaptimātram evedam*) were not understood as a complete sentence. The second reading, though, is corroborated by Sthiramati, and links Verse 1 quite well to the arguments found in verses 6-8.

The language and tenor of the objections, as well as the common ground assumed by the rebuttals, set the treatise within the cosmology of the *Abhidharma*. This can be seen throughout the text, and hence it would be hard to deny that the context of the establishment of cognition-only (*viññaptimātratāsiddhiḥ*) is indeed *Abhidharma*. One section more than others, though, shows how the main argument (as delineated in my reading of Verse 1) is primarily an Abhidharmic thesis. What was stated in the first verse is developed in the section comprising verses 6, 7 and 8.

5.1.3 The proper locus of dependent arising

To anticipate the outcome of the following analysis: Vasubandhu is arguing that the proper place of occurrence of dependent arising is no other than consciousness. This is an important axiom that differentiates *Yogācāra* from other Buddhist systems, and is implied in the statement of verse 1. Vasubandhu supports his main idea by appealing to certain further Abhidharmic considerations.

of hair, etc., does arise from appearance of what is false, if we consider the process of the arising of *viññaptis* from a *Yogācāra* perspective.

The sixth verse of the Twenty may appear as a digression into a subtle, but possibly idle, cosmological dispute. The animals in the heavens are 'real', in the sense of possessing a mind-stream, while the hell-guards are not so, they are mere inanimate dolls. The difference has to be accounted for: in both cases we have a mixture of two *gatis*, realms of existence.

Vasubandhu upholds that the ground of the distinction is the ability to enjoy the characteristics of the respective realm. While the animals may be perfectly capable to enjoy heavenly pleasures, hell-guards would be impaired in their functions if they were to undergo the same torment as the hell-beings. Thus, there is no karmic justification for their presence there, and we must remember that the realms are places of karmic retribution (in fact, they are formed by the force of the collective *karman* of the beings there). Yet, how is this going to help the argument for *viññapti-mātratā* ?

Anacker suggests that Vasubandhu is here venting his dislike for the idea of 'real' hells, but this seems a weak justification for the lengthy discussion.³²⁰ We can make better sense of the digression by placing it within Abhidharmic cosmogony, skilfully bent towards Vasubandhu's thesis.

The question of the genesis and nature of the hell-guards allows the author to introduce one of the most important arguments in the work. The distinction

³²⁰ Despite what Anacker says about Vasubandhu's position, I find no indication that he treats the hells as ontologically different from the human realms. His speculation about Vasubandhu's motives and inner attitude towards the hells has no textual corroboration whatsoever, at least that I know of. Besides, the depiction of hells as "an approved place for the infliction of suffering" in no way represents the views of 'traditional Buddhist exegetes', which Vasubandhu would then see as 'abhorrent'. It is a basic Abhidharmic idea that there is nobody to approve or disapprove, or decide for, the constitution of a certain realm: the latter is taken as a result of causes and conditions, including of course living beings' *karman*. I therefore see no basis for Anacker's reconstruction of the issue at stake. See S. Anacker (tr.), *Seven Works of Vasubandhu*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, page 160.

between the plausibility of animal birth in the heavens (*svarga*) and the non-plausibility of the hungry ghosts' birth in the hells (hell-guards seem to be classified as *pretas*) stresses the retributive character of the realms, an obvious reminder of the formative role that *karman* plays in framing the 'receptacle world' (*bhajana-loka*) as a whole. In this view, the world is but a delayed mirror of collective intention, as the force of previous actions (whose quality depends on intention) structures a shared environment for beings with similar pasts. Thus, like trees for humans, the terrifying shapes of the guardians of hells are projections of past deeds - the past deeds of those living there. I disagree with Anacker that Vasubandhu is here in any way doing away with a classical feature of Buddhist cosmology. In fact, the hells exist as collective projections as much as the heavens, or the human realms, do. The hell-guards, though, could not perform any function if they were to get the karmic retribution, which constitutes hells and consists in un-remitting pain, while the same cannot be said of animals in the heavens.

Once the formative role of consciousness is stressed and accepted, it is quite plausible to ask why the cause should be conscious and not the effect. Vasubandhu points out that it is more sensible to accept that: the cause, the *vāsanā* or influence of previous deeds, as well as the effect, the perceptions of a specific realm (including the hell-guards) are in the same locus - one's continuum of consciousness.

Vasubandhu's digression, far from being mere idiosyncratic fancy, allows him to shift from the rebuttal of main objections to a central theme in *Abhidharma*: the history of past *karma* becomes the explanation of the 'appearance of a false

object' (*asad-artha-avabhāsa*), unfolding the implications of the very first verse.³²¹

If this reading of the main *Yogācāra* thesis as presented in the Twenty Verses may be found plausible, it may offer a good case in contrast with what has been said of *Madhyamaka*. *Mādhyamikas* focussed on discussing the very terms of the *Abhidharma*: we may say that their analysis is not just *within*, but also predominantly *about* the *Abhidharma*. Vasubandhu's argument, on the other hand, is entirely internal to the system it debates with: it speaks the same language, without looking at it from a distance.

5.1.4 Real referents of a metaphor: a comparison with the Thirty Verses

The Thirty Verses can be read as a companion text to the Twenty. Their closeness to *Abhidharma* is more pronounced, as they in effect describe the workings of various layers of consciousness, which comprise all possible *dharma*s. That this is the case is especially borne out by the first verse and its

³²¹The whole discussion seems closely related to a debate in *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* to 3.58, where we find two options: either the hell-guards are living beings, or the hell guards are modifications of the elements, brought about by the collective karma of the hell-denizens, just like the wind at the end of a world-cycle. We can see that these two options correspond to the first and second objections to Vasubandhu's position in the *Vimśatikā*. Among Tibetan scholars, sGam.po.pa makes this link explicit, identifying the first view as *Vaibhāṣika* and the second as *Sautrāntika*, then passing on to describe the *Yogācāra* position in terms which accord with the *Vimśatikā*.

See H.V. Guenther (tr.), *SGam.po.pa, The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, Boston: Shambala, 1971: 'Are these hellish demons who preserve the appearance of human beings and the guardians such as the ravens with iron beaks (khva.lcags.kyi mchu.can) sentient beings? The *Vaibhāṣikas* say, and the *Sautrāntika* deny, that they are, while the *Yogācāras* as well as Mar.pa and Mi.la.ras.pa in their Father-Son-Instruction declare that because of evil deeds committed by the victims, there arises in their minds the appearance of such hellish beings.' Guenther (see his note to this passage) notices the reference to the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*, but misses the link with the *Vimśatikā*.

use of the word *upacāra*. Available renderings of this verse, I shall argue, miss its central purport.

In Chapter 2, I discussed the occurrence and meaning of the term *upacāra* in the *Abhidharmakośa*. There, it referred to the usage of the word *ātman*, and how this has to be understood as a secondary usage, referring to something else: namely, mind (*citta*).

Verse 1 of the Thirty makes a similar statement, and I believe it should be translated as follows:

The metaphor of self and *dharma*s, which occurs as manifold,
refers to the transformation of consciousness: and the transformation is
threefold.³²²

This reading is in line with the usage of *upacāra* in the *Kośa*, which in itself supports it. I in fact believe that *Vaibhāṣika* texts should be used as a more plausible background for Vasubandhu's *Yogācāra*; rather than, for example, *Theravāda* sources.³²³

³²² *ātmadharmopacāro hi vividho yaḥ pravartate | vijñānapariṇāme'sau pariṇamaḥ sa ca tridhā*
| *Trīṃśikā*, verse 1.

³²³ I consider that here Kalupahana's exegesis rests on a dubious methodology. He reads Vasubandhu (and in fact, Nāgārjuna) against the backdrop of Pali Buddhism. There is no evidence, to my knowledge, that Pali Buddhism was at all popular in Northern India during the Gupta era. Hence it is not sensible to take that as a presupposition of Vasubandhu's arguments. To say that Pali Buddhism is better representative of 'early Buddhism', and hence should be used as a plausible starting point, two answers can be given. The first is that the presupposition is open to debate. More importantly, even if we were to accept it, Vasubandhu had most likely formed himself on the *Vaibhāṣika* Āgamas, as opposed to the Pali *Nikāyas*. Hence there is no justification to take Pali Buddhism as the horizon, within which Vasubandhu's arguments operate.

See David J. Kalupahana, *A History of Buddhist Philosophy: Continuities and Discontinuities*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.

In the case of Asaṅga, it has been argued that he stemmed from a *Mahīśāsaka* milieu. See André Bareau, 'The List of the *Asaṃskṛta-dharma* According to Asaṅga', in R.K.Sharma (ed.) *Researches in Indian & Buddhist Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993, pages 1- 6.

Secondly, this is precisely the manner in which Sthiramati reads the verse. Raja had noticed that this section of Sthiramati's commentary may in fact be one of the oldest discussions of the term *upacāra*.³²⁴

Lastly, a specific usage of the 7th *vibhakti* supports this reading. I shall contrast it with Anacker's rendering and show why the latter is weaker:

The metaphors of "self" and "events" which develop in so many different ways take place in the transformation of consciousness: and this transformation is of three kinds: [...]³²⁵

The major difference is here in the third quarter. Anacker translates it as 'take place in the transformation of consciousness', while I understand it as 'it refers to'. This is a common usage of the 7th *vibhakti*, meaning that one term refers to another, and is all the more common in case of nominal constructions (please notice how both Anacker and myself, in fact, need to provide a verb for *viññānapariṇāme 'sau*). The fact that the term *upacāra* is used further justifies my translation as opposed to Anacker's. *Upacāra* is a secondary usage, which refers to something else. I will not press the point much further, as any Sanskrit reader acquainted with the long discussions of *bhakti* and *lakṣaṇā* in *Alamkāraśāstra* (and elsewhere) may immediately and easily recognise what I am referring to.³²⁶

³²⁴K.K. Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning*, Madras: The Adyar Library and Research Centre, 1963. See also K.K. Raja, 'Buddhist and Mīmāṃsā views on Lakṣaṇā', in R.K.Sharma (ed.), *Researches in Indian & Buddhist Philosophy*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1993, pages 195 – 201.

³²⁵S. Anacker (tr.), *Seven Works of Vasubandhu*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, page 186.

³²⁶On this, again, see Raja's well-presented discussion.

Anacker rightly notices that

The “self” has been regarded as a metaphor throughout Buddhism. But here the concept of “event”, accepted in Abhidharma circles, is also called metaphor.³²⁷

This is in tune with my argument about the relationship between the *upacāra* of the *Kośa* and what we find here: a mere extension. Indeed, if we took away the term *dharma* from Verse 1, the first sentence could well be a *Vaibhāṣika* statement.

The full implications of this shift, and of the usage of the term of *upacāra*, though, are not addressed by Anacker. The statement discloses the proper referent of both metaphorical expressions: ‘self’ and *dharma*s. If the transformation of consciousness is their actual referent, it follows that a discussion of its subdivisions and working includes by default all possible *dharma*s we may talk about. Just like in any other *Abhidharma* endeavour, Vasubandhu is concerned with explaining the real referents of more approximate expressions.

It is also worth stressing that the term *upacāra* contains a significant ambivalence. In one sense, as Sthiramati points out, it is *bhrama* or error: as it consists in taking one thing for another.³²⁸ But even the examples he takes up (like, the ‘student is fire’) are cases of a conscious error, a wilful going astray of speech. When *Yogācāra* philosophers speak of *dharma*s it is not a mistake, but an approximation: just as when the Buddha spoke of a ‘self’, as explained in the *Kośa*.

³²⁷S.Anacker (tr.), *Seven Works of Vasubandhu*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998, page 183. I would here disagree with Anacker’s choice to translate *dharma* as event, both on etymological as well as philosophical grounds.

³²⁸ See the *Trisīkābhāṣya* to verse 1.

5.2 The importance of *lakṣaṇas*

I have indicated how, although the Twenty Verses relate very directly to *Abhidharma*, they cannot be called an Abhidharmic treatise, while the case is different for the Thirty. A proper *Abhidharmaśāstra* should give a list of *dharma*s and their *lakṣaṇas*: this is what several other *Yogācāra* works do, to a greater or lesser extent. They are lists of all that which exists, and of how it works, just as the *Abhidharmakośa* is.

I have mentioned how this is true of the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* and its *Bhāṣya*, the *Pañcaskandhaprakaraṇa*. Asaṅga's **Śatadharmaśāstra*, important work for Chinese *Yogācāra*, falls within a similar category. The Thirty Verses also start by stating all that which exists (a transformation of consciousness) and then define its subdivisions, as well as which *dharma*s accompany which. As I will try to show, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* has a similar structure.

The difference with *Madhyamaka* texts is quite sharp: the latter do not form new definitions for enlarged lists of *dharma*s. Their lists are nonetheless in one respect broader, since the two truths do not just comprise *dharma*s (*saṃvṛti*), but emptiness (or, *paramārtha*) as well: the latter is not treated as an existent *dharma* in a list of compounded and un-compounded factors, as *Yogācāra* authors would. Some may understand the *Yogācāra* interest in *dharma*s and *lakṣaṇas* as stemming from their greater emphasis on introspective practice: I would argue that it stems from a difference in their ontological perspective as well.

5.2.1 The first Chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga*

In the *Paramārthagāthā*, Asaṅga states that

The name ‘person’ should refer to a stream, and the term ‘*dharma*’, to a *lakṣaṇa*.³²⁹

If we take the statement strictly, it differs from the *Vaibhāṣika* understanding of *dharma*s, according to which certain *dharma*s are *lakṣaṇa*s, while others are *lakṣya*s. It resembles, on the other hand, the *Sautrāntika* perspective on the actual identity of the two (there is no *lakṣya* beyond the *lakṣaṇa* itself).³³⁰ In effect, this appears to be Sthiramati’s explicit position:

Their own-being itself is indeed the *lakṣaṇa* of things. It is in this way: the earth-element is solid in *lakṣaṇa*, and there is no earth-element apart from solidity.³³¹

This is in rather stark contrast to Candrakīrti’s (and Nāgārjuna’s) position on *lakṣaṇa*s as one empty element in an interdependent pair.³³² I have here translated *svabhāva* as own-being, rather than ‘nature’, to stress this point.

Vasubandhu takes care to specify which *kārikās* of the first Chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (called ‘the Chapter on *lakṣaṇa*s’) refers to which type of *lakṣaṇa*. He also concludes the discussion by giving out another list of *lakṣaṇa*s, which corresponds to the structure of the Chapter. The first section of this list is significant: the *lakṣaṇa* of existence and the *lakṣaṇa* of non-existence; in respect

³²⁹ *pravāhe pudgalākhyā syād dharmasamjñā ca lakṣaṇe* || *Paramārthagāthā* 44ab.

³³⁰ For this debate see Chapter 2.1.

³³¹ *svabhāva eva hi bhāvānām lakṣaṇam* | *tadyathā pṛthivīdhātuḥ kharalakṣaṇo na ca kharatvāt pṛthivīdhātuḥ pṛthagastīti* || Sthiramati’s *ṭīkā* on *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.1.

³³² See Chapter 3.2.1.

to the first, the *lakṣaṇa* of being free from existence and from non-existence, and free from identity and difference.³³³

Madhyamaka texts emphasise how *lakṣaṇas* are not, in fact, ultimately tenable. They also proceed to refute the true existence of *dharmas*, by refuting their *lakṣaṇas*: this is how the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* begins, in reference to the four conditions.³³⁴

On the other hand, the *Madhyāntavibhāga* starts by devoting its first chapter to the formation of sensible *lakṣaṇas*, and Vasubandhu explains how these *lakṣaṇas* distinguish between what truly exists and what does not. The chapter also resembles the *Abhidharmakośa*, inasmuch as it constitutes a grouping of all existent *dharmas* (within the three *svabhāvas* or *lakṣaṇas*, which it describes).

The emphasis on *lakṣaṇas* suggests a remarkable distance from the *Madhyamaka* approach, a distance which Sthiramati (plausibly) reads as a polemic between the lines. Sthiramati highlights the difference between the two systems by adding words like ‘ultimately’ (*paramārthataḥ*) or ‘essentially’ (*svabhāvataḥ*) where the *kārikā* simply says ‘it exists’.³³⁵ Although these are indeed additions by Sthiramati, his comments seem more cogent than reading Vasubandhu as asserting that the dependent nature exists, but only conventionally: nowhere (that I know of) does he state as much.

³³³ *tatra lakṣaṇataḥ abhāvalakṣaṇato bhāvalakṣaṇataś ca | bhāvalakṣaṇaṁ punar
bhāvābhāvavinirmuktalakṣaṇataś ca tattvānyatvinirmuktalakṣaṇataś ca || Bhāṣya on 1.23.*

³³⁴ See Chapter 3.2.2.

³³⁵ See the *ṭīkā* to 1.2: [...] *abhiūtaparikalpo 'stīti svabhāvata itī vākyaśeṣaḥ | [...] |
abhiūtaparikalpaś ca paramārthataḥ svabhāvato 'stī [...] ||*

It may be argued that the difference stems from the *Yogācāra* interest in processes, especially meditative and cognitive processes, as opposed to ontological considerations. In other words, they emphasised *lakṣaṇas* as the latter help understand how *dharma*s function and can be known, as opposed to whether they truly exist.

Nonetheless, the inception and a great bulk of the discussion in the first chapter of the *Madhyāntavibhāga* (as well as in the commentary and sub-commentary) is about, specifically, the *lakṣaṇa* of what does and does not exist. It also gives reasons for which something has to be necessarily accepted as existing, and as non-empty.

The last point brings the discussion to a related argument in *Yogācāra*, that the next section will briefly analyse.

5.2.2 What has *lakṣaṇas*, and what has the *lakṣaṇa* of no-*lakṣaṇa*

To once again summarise Candrakīrti's position, *dharma*s have *lakṣaṇas* only as contingent imputations that work within *saṃvṛti*, while ultimately there is no question of either *lakṣaṇas* or *dharma*s.

This is not quite the case for *Yogācāra*. All *dharma*s fall within the three natures (*trisvabhāva*), which can also be called, three *lakṣaṇas*. The three natures, in turn, are 'nature-less': but in three different senses.

In this scheme, only the misconstrued nature can be said to have 'essence-lessness in terms of *lakṣaṇas*', and this marks it as un-arisen, and utterly non-existence. The other two are explained as not having 'own-being' (*svabhāva*), but in such a way that it safeguards their existence: with no indication

whatsoever that such existence should be further analysed and thus taken as mere convention.

The manner in which *Yogācāra* employs *lakṣaṇas* ensures that consciousness retains a real aspect, irreducible under analysis, and thus ultimately existent. I shall further analyse this theme, by turning back to *kāraṇas*.

5.3 *Kāraṇas* and the irreducibility of consciousness

In the scheme just presented, consciousness falls within that which, being dependently arisen, truly exists. We may therefore now ask which special features make it immune from deconstructing analysis. I will propose that this can be looked at from the perspective of *kāraṇas*.

The characterisation of consciousness as luminous by nature, as the support of purification, and so forth, are all traceable to the absence of the misconstrued nature (*parikalpitasvabhāva*) in the dependent (*paratantra*): the emptiness, which constitutes the perfectly accomplished nature (*pariniṣpanna*). This is more specifically the absence of two things (*advaya*): an agent of apprehension (*grāhaka*) and an object of the same action (*grāhya*). This is where analysis in terms *kāraṇa* categories becomes possible.

The relation to *kāraṇas* also bears on a more fundamental issue that the previous sections of the thesis have touched between the lines: how close is the link between consciousness and language structures? Several prior considerations suggest that, for both *Vaibhāṣika* and *Madhyamaka*, the relationship was significant. Perhaps, though, *Yogācāra* authors were proposing a different model altogether.

5.3.1 Consciousness as an action without agent or object

The main argument of the following section is that: the *Yogācāra* system revolves around a reformulation of what constitutes consciousness, and this can be explained from the perspective of *kāraṅkas*. It is an Abhidharmic method, as opposed to a critique of *Abhidharma* (which would be the case of *Madhyamaka*). It is in this way very much akin to their employment and formation of *lakṣaṇas*.

It would be appropriate, from a *Vaibhāṣika* point of view, to call mind or consciousness (*citta* or *viññāna*) an agent: *grāhaka*, something which apprehends. Even if one were to consider it as action itself (*kriyā*), hence apprehension (*grāha*), it would always occur with an object (*karman*): the support (*ālambana*), which constitutes its necessary condition.

In any case, this is the manner in which *Yogācāra* authors explain the terms. Vasubandhu specifies what constitutes *grāhya* and what constitutes *grāhaka* in his commentary to *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.4:

Because of its non-existence, that too is non-existent:

That which is can be apprehended by it is fourfold: visible form and so on, the five sense-faculties, mind, and what is called 'six consciousnesses'. Because of the non-existence of that apprehendable referent, that consciousness too, the apprehender, is non-existent.³³⁶

This is where *Yogācāra* introduces a qualification. *Viññāna* has one further aspect, which is neither *grāhaka* nor *grāhya*: the pair is illusory and does not constitute its true nature. Instead, a further aspect of *viññāna* exists, without agent and without object.

³³⁶ *tadabdhāvāt tad apy asat iti yat tad grāhyaṃ rūpādi pañcendriyaṃ manaḥ
śaḍviññānasamījñakam caturvidham tasya grāhyasyā'bhāvāt tad api grāhakam viññānam asat* ||
Vasubandhu's *Bhāṣya* to *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.4.

This distinction is found both in the *Yogācāra* texts themselves, as well as in the refutations of *Yogācāra* by *Mādhyamika* authors.

Without this distinction, the passage of the *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya* may suggest that *Yogācāra* also completely does away with the existence of any *dharmas*, including consciousness itself. Thus, it would indeed bring *Yogācāra* close to *Madhyamaka*.

Here Sthiramati's commentary is particularly useful, as he introduces the distinction that I have been discussing:

Because of the non-existence of the referent, that consciousness is non-existent. It cognizes, thus it is called consciousness: in the absence of something to be apprehended, the action of cognition is also not fit. Therefore, due to the non-existence of its referent, consciousness too, in the sense of a cognizer, is non-existent: but not in the sense of the appearance of objects, beings, self, and cognitions. Since, if that did not exist, there would follow complete non-existence.³³⁷

It is only consciousness in the sense of the agent of apprehending an object (the usual definition of *viññāna*) that is false: and not, consciousness in general. To say that consciousness is called so because 'it cognizes' makes a grammatical point: although the possibility is there, it should not be understood as an instrument of cognition, or as cognition itself. 'It cognizes, thus it is called consciousness' (*viññānātīti viññānam*) excludes the interpretation as 'one cognizes through that, therefore it is called consciousness (*viññāyate aneneti viññānam*).

³³⁷ *arthābhāvāt tadviññānam asat | viññānātīti viññānam grāhyābhāve viññānāpy ayuktam | tasmād arthābhāvād viññānātītena viññānam asad na tv arthasattvātmavijñaptipratibhāsatayā | tadasattve hi sarvathā bhāvaprasaṅgaḥ ||* Sthiramati's *īkā* on *Madhyāntavibhāgabhāṣya*, verse 1.4. An alternative translation (modified from Friedmann) is in: Paul Williams, *Mahayana Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, New York: Routledge, 2005, page 89. I believe that Williams reconstructs the argument correctly, although its grammatical underpinnings are not brought to relief. I am in overall agreement with Williams comments about interpretations of *Yogācāra* that try to establish how the system does not posit mind as ultimately existent.

The non-existent consciousness should be understood as an agent. On the other hand, the term *pratibhāsa*, translated as ‘appearance’, is necessarily an action. It thus follows that consciousness exists as an action, not as agent or object of the action.

N If we do not accept Sthiramati’s qualification as plausible, subsequent portions of the text looks inconsistent. Vasubandhu, following the content of 1.5, explains that the argument of the preceding verse (that consciousness as *grāhaka* is false) establishes its quality of being a misconception: utter non-existence is not, on the other hand, the way to establish that.³³⁸ This is because a mere error does come into existence.³³⁹ In other words, the error may be an error, but at least its actual existence is not denied.³⁴⁰

If we observe how Śāntideva and Prajñākaramati present and criticise the *Yogācāra* position, it is clear that they understood the opponent system as accepting such a model of consciousness. In particular, verse 16 states that ‘a different’ aspect ‘truly exists’, and Prajñākaramati explains that it is ‘different’ from the aspect of being the agent of apprehension.³⁴¹ This does quite faithfully correspond to the scheme so far described.

³³⁸ *na tathā sarvathābhāvāt ||*

³³⁹ *na ca sarvathābhāvo bhūrantimātrotpādāt ||*

³⁴⁰ This is indirect proof of the authoritativeness of Sthiramati’s commentary: modern scholars, who suggest that his position is in fact at odds with Vasubandhu’s own, would fail to make sense of different (and contiguous) sections of the same text. See Anacker’s stated position and remarks: pages 2-3, also the (rather gratuitously speculative) note 16. Also see Note 8, page 275, which makes rather general statements, eschewing the technicality of the arguments at stake.

³⁴¹ See Appendix 1.

5.3.2 A passage from Asaṅga, on action and agents

The position that actions may exist without agents is explicitly taken up in the initial section of a work by Asaṅga, the *Paramārthagāthā*. The short text, though, presents two possible positions: the first is that there is no agent, but there are actions:

There is no master whomsoever, no agent and no experiencer;
all *dharma*s too are inactive: yet, action occurs.³⁴²

In the ultimate sense, there is selflessness of persons: because they regard that, the stanzas are in the ultimate sense, by counteracting the two extremes of superimpositions and over-negation.

In this context, the master is the agent of possession, the experiencer of actions. With the half verse he discards that its effects have a self, misconstrued as something different. All *dharma*s too are inactive: thus he discards that the *dharma*s themselves may be a self. Through this he avoids the extreme of superimposition.

Yet, action occurs: thus, by the fact that the *dharma*s do exist, he also avoids the extreme of over-negation. In respect to this, there are three types of action: the action of a master, the action of an agent, and the action of an experiencer.³⁴³ [...]

The commentary to Verse 2 also specifies how exactly the ‘master’ and ‘experiencer’ are not to be found within the dependently arisen aggregates, bases and entrances: incidentally, it refers to three means of valid cognition

³⁴² *svāmī na vidyate kaścīn na kartā nāpi vedakaḥ | dharmāḥ sarve 'pi niśceṣṭā atha ced vartate kriyā || Paramārthagāthā 1.* This verse resembles *Vimalakīrtinīrdeśasūtra 1.4: naivātra ātmana na kāraku vedako vā | na ca karmu naśyati śubhaṁ aśubhaṁ ca kiñcit ||*

³⁴³ *pudgalanairātmyaṁ paramārthatas tadadhikārāt paramārthaṁ gāthā | samāropāpavādāntadvayapratipakṣeṇa | tatra svāmī parigrahasya kartā kriyānāṁ vedakaḥ | tat phalānāṁ gāthārdhenārthāntaraparikalpitaṁ ātmānaṁ pratikṣipati |* (Here I read *ātmānaṁ* for Wayman's *ātmānām*)
dharmāḥ sarve 'pi niśceṣṭā iti dharmāṇāṁ evātmavān pratikṣipati | etena samāropāntaṁ parivarjayati | atha ced vartate kriyety anena dharmāstitvena cāpavādāntaṁ parivarjayati | tatra kriyā trividhā svāmikriyā kārakakriyā vedakakriyā ca || Commentary to the same verse.

(*pramāṇa*). This section seems to identify the person (*pudgala*) with the agent or experiencer, as the denial of the two appears to be linked. In this respect, it resembles the *Sautrāntika* position on the same issue, discussed in Chapter 2. If I understand the implications of the commentary correctly, the action here is dependent arising, where there is no ‘master’ to bring it about, or separate person to experience it, and so forth, but only a flow of momentary *dharmas*.

Here Asaṅga delineates the Middle Way in syntactical terms: agents do not exist, but actions do, although the *dharmas* have no activity. This may appear as a contradiction, that the author discusses Verse 5 and its commentary:

All factors are momentary, how can things that don’t stay have actions?
Their existence is itself the action, and that is itself called an agent.³⁴⁴

It has been said: all *dharmas* too are inactive. Yet, it has not been said *how* they are inactive. Thus he says: all factors are momentary how can things that don’t stay have actions?

It has been said: yet, action occurs. Then, when action does not exist, how can action occur? Thus he says: their existence is itself the action and that is itself called an agent. Action is due to being effects: agent is due to being causes.³⁴⁵

According to this section, thus, the coming into existence of the momentary *dharmas* can be called action or agent when referred to either their being effects or causes. It may appear that this places actions and agents on the same plane, but it is not precisely so. Strictly speaking, the existence of actions is at no point denied in the treatise. What is denied is that the *dharmas* may possess activity: *niśceṣṭāḥ*, the term translated as ‘inactive’, should be understood as a *bahuvrīhi*

³⁴⁴ *kṣaṇikāḥ sarvasaṃskārā asthitāṇāṃ kutaḥ kriyā | bhūtir yeṣāṃ kriyāsau ca kāraṇaḥ saiva cocyate* || Verse 5.

³⁴⁵ *dharmāḥ sarve ’pi niśceṣṭā ity uktam | na tūktam katham niśceṣṭā iti | ata āha | kṣaṇikāḥ sarvasaṃskārā asthitāṇāṃ kutaḥ kriyeta | atha ced vartate kriyety uktam | tat katham asatyāṇāṃ kriyāyāṃ kriyā vartata iti āha | bhūtir yeṣāṃ kriyāsau ca kāraṇaḥ saiva cocyata iti | phalativāṭ kriyā hetuvāt kāraṇaḥ* || Commentary to the same Verse.

compound. The *dharma*s, on the other hand, are the action itself. ‘Agents’ too are directly denied existence, and then explained once again as a way of speaking of the same *dharma*s, when understood as causes.

In this way too, agent and action cannot be used to reduce a single moment of consciousness into two components, since the imputation of agent or action is already in relation to other moments. The plane of analysis has shifted from the initial statement about the absence of agents and the existence of actions: *that* was from an ultimate perspective (*paramārtha*). And in that scheme, which corresponds to Vasubandhu’s and Sthiramati’s as depicted above, a moment of consciousness remains irreducible precisely because it is an action, with no agent and no object. By eschewing the usual characterisation (*lakṣaṇa*) of consciousness as a specific *kāraṇa*, it can be asserted as truly existent.

5.3.3 A note on Śāntarakṣita’s position

Śāntarakṣita’s position about consciousness having a nature that cannot be split into the triad of action, agent and object, is expressed in *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2001.³⁴⁶ This has been discussed in Chapter 4, and is treated in one section of Prajñākaramati’s commentary.³⁴⁷

There is one point where Śāntarakṣita’s depiction, in terms of *kāraṇas*, could possibly be distinguishable from Asaṅga. In fact, we can interpret his statement as meaning either that i.) consciousness is not divided into three, because it exists as mere action without the other two; or ii.) none of the three applies as a characterisation of consciousness.

³⁴⁶ *kriyākāraṇabhedaṇa na svasaṃvittir asya tu | ekasyāṇaṃśarūpasya trairūpyānupapattitaḥ ||*

³⁴⁷ See Appendix, commentary to verse 9.20.

A proper assessment of this issue bears, among other things, upon the reconstruction of Śāntarakṣita's arguments in favour of self-awareness (*svasaṁvedanā*). I am unable to determine, though, whether his position entails the first or second structure in terms of *kāraṅkas*. On one hand, he seems to speak of consciousness as apprehension devoid of apprehender and something to apprehend: which would be akin to Asaṅga's, Vasubandhu's, and Sthiramati's position. Yet, the specific explanation of what this apprehension is, suggests that he may not understand it as an action in the first place.³⁴⁸

The second reading would indeed offer some interesting interpretive possibilities, and raise questions about Śāntarakṣita's understanding of the role of *viññaptimātratā*. The differences in his handling of *kāraṅkas*, from both Asaṅga and Vasubandhu on one hand and Prajñākaramati's on the other, may well stem from his employment of *cittamātra*, but only as an intermediate step.³⁴⁹

We also find that this second interpretation is envisaged in at least one passage of Sthiramati's work. He is commenting upon the *Madhyāntavibhāga* 3.17, where an explanation of the eighteen *dhātus* identifies the faculties as the agents (*grāhaka*, hence *karṭṛ*), their objects as objects of the action (*grāhya*, hence *karman*) and the corresponding consciousness as the action (*tadgrāha*, *kriyā*). Sthiramati specifies that the triad of agent, object and action is a delusion:

The *dhātu* is laid out in the sense of the three types of seeds, for the purpose of removing the delusion of an agent, action and object.³⁵⁰

³⁴⁸ See *Tattvasaṁgraha* 2000-2012 with commentary.

³⁴⁹ A proper understanding of Śāntarakṣita's position would require a through analysis of his entire section on *svasaṁvedanā*: which I hope to take up on another occasion.

³⁵⁰ *karṭṛkriyākarmasaṁmohavyāvartanārthaṁ trividhe bījārthe dhātur vyavasthāpitaḥ* || Sub-commentary on *Madhyāntavibhāga* 3.17.

It is nonetheless hard to establish whether this really means that in all instances the three categories are to be considered delusory, or whether there are proper contexts for their usage. In fact, an immediately subsequent section (3.18) explains the sense in which we can have a superimposition or over-negation in respect to cause (*hetu*) result (*phala*) and action (*kriyā*). Hence, just like there may be a proper usage of the idea of *kriyā*, it may be the same for the *kāraṅkas*.

5.4 The role of momentariness in *Yogācāra*

The analysis presented so far clarifies how the *Yogācāra* was close to the interests of previous *Abhidharma*, in terms of its main arguments and the employment of *lakṣaṇas* and *kāraṅkas*. I have also argued that this relates to a difference in ontological approach, rather than a mere disinterest in ontology, when in comparison to the *Madhyamaka*.

When treating of *Madhyamaka*, the proper place of Abhidharmic analysis was discussed in relation to momentariness, and in relation to atoms.³⁵¹ In their system, both fit a similar position: as intermediate conventions, and not ultimate.

In *Yogācāra*, though, the situation is quite dissimilar. Atoms are refuted with a type of analysis, which is both acceptable and occasionally borrowed by *Mādhyamika* authors.³⁵² On the other hand, momentariness appears as an acceptable determination of the ultimately real *dharmas*.

³⁵¹ See Chapter 4.4.3, 4.4.4.

³⁵² Śāntideva's refutation of atoms in the *Prajñāpariccheda* of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* is akin to Vasubandhu's own, in the *Vimśatikā*, which Prajñākaramati even quotes.

It has been even argued that momentariness owes its origin to the *Yogācāra*.³⁵³

In particular, the *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* and its commentary present a section that directly deals with asserting that *dharma*s are momentary. One line of argument relates to the refutation of movement:

(Momentariness of consciousness should be accepted) because, when something originates as moving to another place, there is no movement.

No action whatsoever, by the name 'movement', defined as the transference to another place, is indeed plausible for the factors.

Either an already arisen (movement), or one yet to arise, would cause the impression to move elsewhere. If already arisen, at the time of movement (the impression) would have yet moved nowhere: in this case, the movement of something static is not plausible. Or, if yet to arise, when there is no movement it makes no sense to say 'gone to'.

And, it makes no sense to say that such action generates activity in an impression which stays in the very same place. Since that which is static does not get to another place. On the other hand, it makes no sense in an impression which is placed elsewhere. Since, without action, there is no getting to another place. And, apart from the impression, no other action is perceived, in the same place or elsewhere.

Therefore, there is no other 'movement', apart from the birth of the continuum in another place. Because that does not exist, momentariness is proved.³⁵⁴

³⁵³ Alexander Von Rospatt, *The Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness*, Stuttgart: Franz Veiner Verlag, 1995. For some disagreements with this position, see: Y. Karunadasa, 'The Theravada Version of the Buddhist Doctrine of Momentariness', in *Journal of Buddhist Studies*, Volume 1, Sri Lanka: Centre for Buddhist Studies, 2003, pages 120-185.

³⁵⁴ *deśāntaragamanena utpattau gatyabhāvāt | na hi saṃskārāṇāṃ deśāntarasamkrāntilakṣaṇā gatir nāma kācid kriyā yujyate | sā hi utpannā vā saṃskāraṃ deśāntaraṃ gamayed anutpannā vā | yady utpannā tena gatikāle na kañcid gata iti sthitasyaiva gamanaṃ nopapadyate | atha anutpannā tena asatyāṇi gatau gata iti na yujyate | sā ca kriyā yadi taddeśastha eva saṃskāre kāritraṃ karoti na yujyate | sthitasya anyadeśāprāpteh | atha anyadeśasthe na yujyate | vinā kriyā anyadeśāprāpteh | na ca kriyā tatra vā anyatra vā deśe sthitā saṃskārād anyopalabhyate | tasmān nāsti saṃskārāṇāṃ deśāntarasantatyutpādād anyā gatiḥ | tadabhāvāc ca siddhaṃ kṣaṇikatvam || Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra 18. 85, commentary.*

The passage offers a proof of momentariness, in no way suggesting that it is a mere conventional characterisation: even Asaṅga's text, dedicated to *paramārtha*, described the *dharma*s as momentary. The section of Vasubandhu's commentary under consideration comes in the context of proving the momentariness of the subjective (internal) side of experience.

In the immediately preceding section of the commentary, change, not movement, is used to prove momentariness.³⁵⁵ The first arising of the impressions (*ādyā-utpāda*) in a new rebirth has to come from specific causes (*hetutva-viśeṣāt*). If it did not come from specific causes, but was due to the same one cause, we would not perceive a succession of changing conditions – since the cause for the succeeding impressions would have remained the same. If we accept that the cause of the first arising is different from the causes of the succeeding impressions, this entails their momentariness (following from their impermanence)³⁵⁶. An analogous argument, taking change as the logical ground to prove momentariness, is employed in the examples of growth, accumulation, change of locus (*āśraya*), maturation leading to good or bad rebirth, even in the *bhāsva* realm. So far, the step is from impermanence to momentariness.

The portion which we are analysing implies a more complex scheme. Von Rospatt, taking the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* as one of his main sources, has detected three main deductions of momentariness: a generalisation of the accepted momentariness of mind, an argument from change and one from

³⁵⁵ See commentary on *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* 18, 84-88. Significantly, the section commenting upon *deśāntaragamanena* (18, 85) is the longest and most elaborate. It is also the only one to comprise a sub-list of examples, of the different types of *gati*.

³⁵⁶ *yadi hi tasya hetutvena viśeṣo na syāt, taduttarāyāḥ saṃskārapravṛtter uttarottaraviśeṣo nopalabhyeta, hetvaviśeṣāt | viśeṣe ca sati, taduttarebhyas tasya anyatvāt kṣaṇikatvasiddhiḥ || Ibidem.*

destruction. The analysis in this section Vasubandhu's commentary has a further starting point: an argument from the impossibility of motion.

If we compare it with Nāgārjuna's refutation of motion, we find several differences. The second Chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* refutes motion through a syntactical dialectic, according to which agent and action (like going and the one who goes) make for an interdependent pair, where one implies the other.³⁵⁷ On the other hand, Vasubandhu's argument only focuses on the impossibility of an action beyond the *saṃskāras* themselves. In other words, we can speak of an action (movement, going), as long as we understand that the *saṃskāras* do not 'possess' that action: they are the action. This is akin to Asaṅga's position in the *Paramārthagāthā* (see above).

Moreover, Nāgārjuna's argument does not end with the assertion of some Abhidharmic category, like a momentary *dharma*: while Vasubandhu's line of argument presupposes that the *dharma*s are in fact there, and goes on to prove their momentariness.

5.5 Conclusion

In this way, the relatively short passage well exemplifies the differences between *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*, both in their relation to *kāraṅkas* and in their usage of *Abhidharma*. As by now should be clear, I believe that there is a significant connection between the two aspects: when Abhidharmic categories are considered fit depictions of ultimate realities, it is possible to discard the ordinary interdependence of *kāraṅkas*, and attempt to offer a language

³⁵⁷ See on this Kamaleshvar Bhattacharya, 'Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion: their grammatical basis', (in Kamaleshvar Bhattacharya et al., *A corpus of Indian studies. Essays in honour of Professor Gaurinath Sastri*, Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1980.

unrestricted by those, to speak of *paramārtha*. In one sense, this should help safeguard *paramārtha* as a possible object of further analysis, as it is described with *sui generis* categories (like, an action without an agent), which are not any more relatable to the other elements found in ordinary usage.

Madhyamaka authors were aware of this step: hence, the debate between the two systems should also be understood at this level of analysis, where a plausible use of language is being discussed. Taking this aspect of the debate into serious consideration means a different emphasis in the interpretation of *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*; I believe that this shift of emphasis does better justice to the sophistication of the arguments involved, by placing them in a suitable context and hence drawing out more precisely the sense of the elements at play in the objections and rebuttals – rather than merely focusing on the argumentative structure.

Even with this shift of emphasis, though, I am inclined to agree with the traditional interpretation that sees the difference between *Yogācāra* and *Madhyamaka* to be substantial, not merely one of approach. In fact, an analysis of their respective usage of the *kāraka* system shows that *Mādhyamakas* emphasise the interdependence of the *kāraḥ* and the *kriyā*, while *Yogācāra* philosophers look for an element, which may remain immune to analysis. It is difficult to construe this as a mere difference in epistemology, as it implies a different ontological commitment.

Conclusion

Throughout the thesis, I have taken up for analysis concerns and debates that I consider central to medieval Indian Buddhism, to show how *vyākaraṇa* (the *kāraṇa* system) and the analysis of *lakṣaṇas* (central to *Abhidharma*) play a role in philosophical thought: especially in regards to whether something can be considered ultimate (not analysable further) and if so, what can be accepted to be an ultimate. This could be categorised as the fundamental ontological stance in any of the philosophical schools taken up in this thesis. It is important to stress that here ultimate does not necessarily mean a thing as opposed to a process, nor does it imply any notion of a core or substance: I use the word in the technical sense of anything, which cannot be analysed into further components (hence, which can be taken as the most fundamental unit of existence). I understand the *Vaibhāṣika*, *Sautrāntika*, *Yogācāra* and *Madhyamaka* as having distinct positions in regards to ultimates; I also think that their debates are genuine, in the sense of the philosophers working under similar presupposition and understanding each other's stance. In other words, they are not playing different 'linguistic games', but each is attempting to win the very same game.

I have more specifically tried to show the profitability of reading the two main philosophical systematisations of the *Mahāyāna* (i.e. *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*) against a broader backdrop of analytical conventions: some common to Indian *śāstras* as a whole (i.e. *vyākaraṇa*) and other specific to the Buddhist (i.e. the *Abhidharma*). In this way, the texts have consistently been read as referring to shared ideas in a context broader than the specific issues at hand: this can plausibly clarify the latter as well. I have not attempted to give out a precise historical reconstruction, either in terms of being exhaustive, or as an account of plausible genetic relations between ideas: my concern was more

basic, as I tried to make better sense of the original sources, through a more refined understanding of their language.

To analyse the language of philosophical argumentation may appear as no more than a necessary first step, and indeed it is a first step: but when the debates themselves end up focusing on language, it also becomes the fundamental methodological concern. When the arguments start discussing a proper use of language it usually means that they have come to the last (arguably the most difficult) possible point of discussion: they are discussing about what can and what cannot be spoken, and how. I may therefore say that this thesis is both about the presuppositions as well as about the final stages of Buddhist philosophical discourse.

The entirety of the thesis can be read in this light. The first and second Chapters focus on the presuppositions, the common ground: and their point of contact is in the fact that both *vyākaraṇa* and the *Abhidharma* are, in different senses, systems of *lakṣaṇas* (defining traits or definitions). The second Chapter offers some intermediate ground, as it reconstructs debates that are envisaging the topics of the next three Chapters: there is an initial discussion about *lakṣaṇas*, but the central concern in *Abhidharma* is to form *lakṣaṇas* rather than evaluate their ontological status. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 enter into the debates about defining traits and the proper use of language, as found in the philosophies of *Madhyamaka* and *Yogācāra*.

The word *lakṣaṇa* in itself offers a significant ambivalence: it can be understood to refer to either the data (defining traits) or their interpretation (definitions), and by now it should be comprehensible that one of the issues at stake in all the debates encountered so far is the relationship between these two possible senses. Looking at the same issue from the perspective of the *kāraṇa* system, it

reappears as the proper relation between syntax and semantics, between sentence-analysis and relations 'in the world'. I started by noticing, in the first Chapter, how there occur certain structural symmetries between *kāra*ka relations and fundamental Buddhist ideas. The symmetry only works, though, as long as the very technical senses of the primary *kāra*kas are kept in mind, hence only through a remarkable amount of semantic indirection (an 'agent' is not 'someone' who does something). But because the more direct senses of 'agent' and so forth do not square well with certain features of Buddhist thought, it became a debatable issue as to whether those categories can be retained at all levels of analysis: *Vaibhāṣikas* did retain them; *Sautrāntikas* rejected them; certain *Mādhyamikas* considered them *conventionally* indispensable; *Yogācāra* philosophers attempted to redefine them. True, this is a schematic account: yet, it is a profitable starting point for some further considerations.

It can be seen that there is a certain similarity between the *Vaibhāṣikas* and *Madhyamaka* on one side, and the *Sautrāntika* and *Yogācāra* on the other. This similarity has been already noticed in regards to other aspects of their thought, but here I highlighted it from the perspective of their fundamental understanding of language as 'syntax of the real' (or, of the unreal).

The question could then be: do the other similarities and differences stem from these divergent attitudes towards language, or *viceversa*? It would be easier to presume the first alternative, and it may perhaps fit the overall trend of my thesis so far, but I am disinclined to offer any conclusion in this regards. Using either *the tenets* or *the use of language* in each of the schools as a starting point, one could probably bring forth strong arguments to derive any of the two from the other. Hence I believe that it would be very difficult to come to a convincing conclusion (because, both alternatives could sound convincing).

What is more feasible, and perhaps sensible, is to at least be aware of the structural similarities and the role that a certain understanding of language may have in shaping the outcome of philosophical arguments between the schools: and this much, I think I have done. To give specific examples: I have not so much tried to give historical reasons for Candrakīrti's invocation of the *kāra*kas in his refutation of the *svalakṣaṇa*. But I have tried to highlight that such invocation is philosophically relevant, and also I have attempted to analyse what its intended force could be, and why is it called for at a crucial juncture in the debate. The same applies to my reconstruction of Prajñākaramati's criticism of *svasaṃvedanā*, where I argued that the usage of *kāra*ka categories might have a somewhat different purpose than in the case of Candrakīrti's refutations (without being contradictory to the latter's approach). What these two examples show is that, even in the case of two authors who have a relative theoretical proximity, we must be extremely sensitive to the context and the technicalities involved in the argumentation when trying to reconstruct a debate: all the more so, when the debate starts discussing a proper use of philosophical language.

I am aware that some of the specific conclusions about the established tenets of the four schools I analysed, may not be agreed upon by all scholars: I do not think, though, that this will greatly damage the strength of my overall argument. I am in fact, more broadly, arguing about the profitability of a certain *method*. This method (which I tried to follow) is to take certain technicalities in Indian Buddhist thought quite seriously: not to gloss over them, but rather to provide glosses, which will bridge the gap between a medieval Indian scholar and a contemporary reader.

This gap is perhaps best understood as follows: there are certain presuppositions, which classical authors took too much for granted to spell out, and that many modern interpreters consider too technical or uninteresting to take into serious

consideration. The two issues go hand in hand: since the texts themselves do not always signal out-loud what is in fact important, it is assumed by modern authors that, let us say, *kāraka* analysis or *Abhidharma* is not crucial in understanding *Madhyamaka* (think of Williams' remarks about *vyākaraṇa* being an *elitist* set of conventions).

On the other hand, I should have amply demonstrated that Buddhist classical authors assumed that their readers would have been familiar with both *vyākaraṇa* and *Abhidharma*, much in the same way that an English literature professor may assume that one's students know the English alphabet. In fact, the few accounts of ancient learning in India that we possess (like those of Chinese travelers) suggest that *vyākaraṇa* was a starting point; and *Abhidharmic* categories form a remarkable part of the basic curriculum even in contemporary traditional Tibetan monastic education, which must have inherited many features of Buddhist higher education in medieval India.

It would be unfair to state that no previous scholar noticed the importance of *vyākaraṇa* and basic *Abhidharma* for the understanding of *Mahāyāna* thought: and I have acknowledged in several occasions my indebtedness to available scholarship. Nonetheless, I do think that this thesis provides a broad and sustained analysis of a variety of sources; hence it is neither too generic nor too specialised. In this respect I think it differs both from the more generic statements about the importance of *vyākaraṇa* and so forth, as well as from the available specialised essays on very specific instances. The generic statements remain somewhat vague and uncorroborated by sufficient sources (rather, they implicitly appeal to the erudition of the reader); the specific case-studies do not formulate any synthetic interpretation.

One last consideration: I am surely not arguing that a debate on language is something of a scholastic and uninteresting preoccupation. On the other hand, I do think it is philosophically crucial. Nevertheless, I would also like to avoid a quick assimilation of Buddhist thought to the philosophies of language and interpretation of contemporary Europe and North America (like, let us say, Heidegger). In part, I do not feel equipped to propose such complex parallels. But I would like to remark that there are some important issues within Buddhist thought that need to be properly understood before assimilating it to a philosophy of language of any kind.

First, the proper role of philosophical debate within Indian Buddhism needs to be assessed: and this can be done only } trying to reconstruct the context of medieval Indian Buddhist textual practices by reading between the lines, and by taking hints from the available practices in contemporary traditional Buddhist cultures. Reading between the lines means, taking into account such things as style and humour, which can help to understand the intended weight of a certain statement in a text. For example: how does the overall tone of an Abhidharmic treatise differ from that of a modern analytical philosopher? I am not suggesting that one should make a systematic study of such an issue, but I do think one must be sensible to style and diction in order to grasp the intention of a given text.

Secondly, there are certain technical aspects of Buddhist thought that need to be properly interpreted before making such assimilations. What is the precise relationship between mental constructs (*vikalpa*), imputations (*prajñapti*) and names (*nāma*)? What is relationship between names (*nāma*) and the aggregate of notions (*saṃnāskandha*)? How do all these categories relate to the world as an environment (*bhājanaloka*) and the world as the collection of sentient beings (*sattvaloka*)?

All of these issues are occasionally taken up in a variety of different texts: in *Sūtras*, in Abhidharmic commentaries, or in *Madhyamaka* treatises, for example. I have not attempted to exhaust all of the interpretive concerns that could allow for a well-informed and sound reconstruction of the *Mahāyāna* understanding of language. I have attempted, though, to offer an initial basis, and to bring the analysis to a better level of refinement. The thesis should have demonstrated that *vyākaraṇa* and the analysis of *lakṣaṇas* run through central debates throughout medieval Indian Buddhism, being formative parts of the arguments at stake, rather than authorial idiosyncrasies: and that the issue of whether something can be analysed or can remain as an un-analysable ultimate (like the *svalakṣaṇa*, *svasaṃvedanā* or *viññaptimātratā*) is closely linked to handling of *kāraṇas* and certain specific view on the formation of *lakṣaṇas* through them.

Appendix 1

Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra, 9.1-34
with Prajñākaramati's Pañjikā:
English Translation

Note on the Translation

I have taken some freedom in changing the constructions from passive to active, and in providing whichever words would make the English text intelligible. Also, I have not followed the convention of bracketing such additions, except for a few cases. I believe that anyone acquainted with Sanskrit will be able to recognise the additions, while for others brackets are cumbersome and tell very little. Let me exemplify this through one instance, where I add and change quite a few words.

The commentator offers two alternative explanations of Verse 32. For the second interpretation, he avoids repeating what was already said, by stating that *The rest can be entirely explained as in the first explanation.*

This is how I translated the Sanskrit expression

Anyat sarvam pūrvavat

Very literally, this could be rendered as

All else, like the earlier one.

But this, in English, is not even a complete sentence. Moreover, the fact that Sanskrit can tell more about the referents of pronouns, thanks to three noun-genders and of course inflection, cannot be reproduced by English pronouns. Or, in certain cases, idiomatic recurrence makes the referents unambiguous in Sanskrit: and this cannot be rendered in English through a literal translation. That is why I decided to explicate the referents of certain pronouns, as in this case, where I translated *pūrvavat* with 'as in the first explanation'.

One may object that such additions could have been marked by bracketing. Hence:

The rest (can be entirely explained) as in the first (explanation).

That makes the text inelegant, and hard to read: at least, to my eyes. Moreover, the same logic would suggest that even articles like ‘the’ and prepositions like ‘in’ should be put between brackets, since their usage is interpretive and does not *literally* reproduce the Sanskrit syntax of article-less *vibhaktis*. And so on.

The second difficult choice regards terminology. Certain key words, like *svabhāva*, have different meanings in different contexts. One could say that all the different meanings rest on a common layer, provided by the etymology. Nonetheless, this commonality of etymology is lost in English: essence, own-being, own-existence, nature, all can be used to translate what is, in fact, the same Sanskrit term. I have not attempted to force a consistency, which would have made the text incomprehensible. On the other hand, an important game of mutual hints is lost without remainder.

Thirdly, there are certain terms, which I decided to retain in the Sanskrit. This is the case for *saṁvṛti* and *paramārtha* (in most instances). The main reason is that the possible meanings of such terms are the topic of the commentary, and therefore no single choice would do justice to the latter.

A good example is the term *saṁvṛti*. This is usually translated as convention, and such translation is indeed a plausible way of looking at its etymology, from the point of view of the commentarial tradition itself. In the case of Prajñākaramati’s interpretation, though, the primary sense of *saṁvṛti* is that of concealment or, more literally covering. Yet, the sense of convention is often implied in many of the usages. Had I chosen ‘concealment’, it would have been awkward and, in some cases, unintelligible. On the other hand, ‘conventions’ is

sharply at odds with Prajñākaramati's (and perhaps, Śāntideva's) interpretive emphasis. Hence, *saṃvṛti* has been left in Sanskrit.

In the case of *paramārtha*, there are even more compelling reasons to retain the Sanskrit. The compound can be split either as *tatpuruṣa* or as *karmadhāraya* (actually, even as a *bahuvrīhi*, although it is not mentioned as such by Prajñākaramati). The commentator offers both possibilities as plausible. Moreover, *artha* has several possible meanings, whose mutual relation is not always perceptible in English. All of this could not be rendered, with any single translation.

There are other instances, where I followed commonly employed usages, despite their being not entirely satisfactory. 'Perfection' is in no way faithful to the etymology of *pāramitā*, and in many contexts such etymology is important (for example, in the Heart Sutra). Nevertheless, Prajñākaramati's commentary does not quite play upon the compound *pāramitā*, and therefore the harm done may be very little.

Using 'wisdom' for *prajñā* has been already criticised by, for example, Williams. Nonetheless, 'discriminative knowledge' is very cumbersome, and the phrase 'perfection of discriminative knowledge' is almost half a line in itself. As long as one remembers that 'wisdom' is used in a technical sense, specified within the commentary, the re-contextualisation should make it acceptable, I hope.

In the Introduction I have hinted at how the following portion of Prajñākaramati's commentary includes most of the topics touched upon within the body of the thesis. It will be noticed that different sections relate differently to the discussions found in the various Chapters.

The Sanskrit text used is Vaidya's edition: although in one case I disagree with his proposed emendations and hence my numbering of the verses differs from his.

The importance of Prajñākaramati's commentary

Prajñākaramati was not by any account a direct student of Śāntideva, and belongs to a slightly later phase of *Madhyamaka* thought in India. One could still make arguments in favour of his relative faithfulness to Śāntideva's own thought, but it is not faithfulness that makes his commentary interesting to the present thesis.

Prajñākaramati's is the only surviving Sanskrit commentary to the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, and has not been translated into English. Although the commentator covered all the Chapters (excluding the tenth), a major bulk of his work is devoted to the 9th Chapter. He seems to treat this as an independent work, as the presence of new invocatory verse indicates. This much has been pointed out by previous scholars.

The invocatory stanzas do themselves tell us certain relevant features of Prajñākaramati's interpretation. First, he stresses the ineffability of the Perfection of Wisdom: 'Perfection of Wisdom' as a word is a type of convention (*saṃvṛti*) or concealment, and yet it can be employed as an indication. To put it, *paramārtha* (the ultimate referent) cannot be directly referred to through language. The section of the commentary translated in this thesis elaborates on this point in some detail.

Almost in the same breath, Prajñākaramati tells us that he intends to make an exposition (*vivṛti*) of the Perfection of Wisdom 'in clear words'. If a paradox can be perceived, it may be just an apparent paradox. When one has to use words as indications, clear words (and cogent reasoning) may work better than unclear ones. This basic consideration is quite in line with Prajñākaramati's

handling of the issue of proper linguistic usage in the debate against self-awareness.

Besides, the expression 'clear words' may be a reference to Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*: Prajñākaramati is heavily indebted to Candrakīrti, whom he quotes several times.

As a commentator, Prajñākaramati does write in a lucid and simple style, quoting from a vast array of Buddhist sources, both sūtras and śāstras. His reconstruction of the opponents' position is in my opinion remarkably accurate: especially in the case of the refutation of *Yogācāra*, which occasions the most interesting debate in terms of the concerns of this thesis.

Prajñākaramati also offers a good discussion about conventions and their levels, an important issue not so explicitly addressed in all *Madhyamaka* sources. In this respect as well, his commentary has great relevance to the issues discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

[167]³⁵⁸ Because it's stainless, the unexcelled abode, free from elaborations or
outflows,
is named through conventional expressions like 'perfection of wisdom' and so
on.

Understanding it well, pure intellects reach supreme bliss.

I bow to her as due, and explain her, through clear words.

Where the *Ācārya*, the treasury of good qualities which is Śāntideva,
can speak clearly, having reached the other shore of the great ocean of Sayings,
how can I, with a flawed intellect, speak the meaning of that? Even then,
because unequalled merit comes from practicing wisdom, I engage in this.

My mind has no impression whatsoever
of any bit of a good quality; and, I have no quality of intuition.

Still, only as the fruit of serving a good friend,
such a speech of mine comes about.

Thus:

Someone, due to his specific lineage, attends upon an auspicious friend, and is
pained by the suffering of all those who have got to the three worlds. He wishes
to remove the entire suffering of all living beings, and indifferent to his own
happiness, he deems that the only means to pacify such suffering would be
Buddhahood. Desiring to obtain it, the *Mahātman*, has caused *bodhicitta* to arise;
to complete the two accumulations which are the means to accomplish the state
of the *Sugata*, in due order, he engages in giving and so forth. As he engages in
this way, he may even perfectly master *śamatha*: but without wisdom, giving
and the rest will not bring about Buddhahood, the cause for the accomplishment

³⁵⁸ The numbers between square brackets refer to the page number in Vaidya's edition.

of the world's good. Considering this, one who wants release from the suffering of *samsāra*, should certainly strive to make wisdom arise. As it is said

Through *śamatha*, one well endowed with *vipaśyanā*

And so on. In that respect, *śamatha* has been explained. Now, explaining *vipaśyanā*, which is obtained immediately after that, and goes by the name of *perfection of wisdom*, he says

The Sage spoke this entire set
for the sake of wisdom:
hence one should bring forth wisdom
with a wish to turn suffering away. 1

Giving and the rest have been explained as per their defining traits, immediately earlier in this treatise. 'This' points to them, in terms of the pronoun *idam*: the latter indicates direct perception. 'Set' means retinue or section, or also an accumulation. 'Entire': in the way expressed, as well as any other. [168] 'The Sage spoke for the sake of wisdom' is the link.

The defining trait of wisdom is to discern the nature of dependently arisen things as it abides. 'For the sake of' that, means that it is the purpose, which has giving and so forth as its 'set': this means that they are the assistants, to the cause of perfect awakening. That is because, wisdom, having the nature of discerning the *dharma*s, is the most important among giving and the other perfections.

In this respect, giving is the first cause towards obtaining a perfect Buddha's awakening, since it is included in the accumulation of merit. And only when

adorned by discipline, bringing about a succession of good births endowed with the conditions for the enjoyment of pleasure, is it a cause for the obtainment of unexcelled *jñāna*.³⁵⁹ Forbearance too, protecting the accumulation of merit - giving and discipline - by counteracting aversion, which is its antagonist, occurs for the realisation of Buddhahood. This good, consisting in the three starting with giving and called 'the accumulation of merit', does not come about without valour. Therefore the latter too, as it is a cause for both accumulations, is born to destroy all obscurations. And for one whose mind is in *samādhi*, there arises the perfect understanding of things as they are: hence, the perfection of meditation is also fit to be a cause for unexcelled *jñāna*.

Thus, even when these giving and so forth are accumulated with care, without wisdom they are not causes for realising the state of a *Sugata*, and thus they are not even called 'perfections'. On the other hand, when they obtain the purification made by wisdom, they occur unimpeded and high: coming about in a way conducive to that state, they become its causes, and they get the name of 'perfections'. Then, purified by wisdom through the *yoga* of not apprehending triads like a giver, a gift and a recipient, and so on; practiced carefully and continuously for a long time, reaching the apex; they bring about the Tathāgata's *dharmakāya*. That is devoid of all the net of constructs occurring due to ignorance, it is free from the obstructions of afflictions and something cognisable, it has the nature of the realisation of the two types of selflessness. It is the basis of the entire wealth of one's own and others' benefit, the very self of *tattva* in the ultimate sense. In this way, giving and the rest, having wisdom as their chief, are called secondary.

³⁵⁹ I have either translated *jñāna* (as, cognition) or left it in the Sanskrit, whenever the context suggested that a special type of cognition was at stake. The Sanskrit term may be used with or without this underlying suggestion: something mirrored in its alternative Tibetan renderings as either *shes pa* or *ye shes*.

Opponent | If wisdom is the main one among giving and so forth, let that alone be the instrument to accomplish perfect Buddhahood. Why bother with the others like giving and so on?

Reply | One should not say this, because the others are described as useful. Only when giving and the rest, as if devoid of eyes, get the eyes of wisdom, can they go towards the desired state of a Sugata. Thus, they are said to be of secondary importance to wisdom; but it is not that wisdom, on its own, is the instrument to accomplish perfect Buddhahood.

Therefore, it is established that the set of giving and so forth, is for the sake of wisdom.

The Sage (*muni*), the silent one, is the Buddha, the Blessed One. This is because: he has no mental construct;
he 'silenced' the two extremes of superimposition and over-negation;
he has the three silences, defined as: the *karman* of body, speech and mind needing no more to be trained. Wishing to protect the entire world, who is suffering from the three types of suffering, he spoke: he has spoken, meaning that he explained. In the *Sūtras* like the *Perfection of Wisdom* and so on, he explained in due order, for the sake of wisdom, the set of giving and so forth. As it is said in the *Noble Perfection of Wisdom in One Hundred Thousand Lines*:

Just like, indeed, o Subhūti, the orb of the sun and the orb of the moon perform their function upon the four continents and follow and go about the four continents, in the very same way the perfection of wisdom performs its function upon the five perfections, follows and goes about the five perfections; the five perfections, without the perfection of wisdom, do not get the name of 'perfections'. Just like, indeed, o Subhūti, a king, a universal monarch, does not get the name of 'universal monarch' without the seven precious things, in the very same way, Subhūti, the five perfections, without the perfection of wisdom, do not get the name

of 'perfections'. Just like, o Subhūti, some small rivers go towards the great river Ganges, and together with the great river Ganges they go towards the great ocean, in the very same way, Subhūti, the five perfections, taken up by the perfection of wisdom, go towards the knowledge of all aspects.

And so on. [169] Moreover, it has been said:

Kauśika, this perfection of wisdom excels the perfection of giving of the Bodhisattvas great beings, it excels the perfection of discipline, it excels the perfection of forbearance, [it excels the perfection of valour,] it excels the perfection of meditation. Just like indeed, o Kauśika, a hundred or a thousand people blind from birth, without a guide cannot set into the path, not to speak of entering the town; in the same way Kauśika, the five perfections are without eyes and blind from birth, if without the perfection of wisdom: they have no guide. Without the perfection of wisdom they cannot set into the path to Buddhahood, what to say of entering the town of the knowledge of all aspects. When on the other hand, Kauśika, the five perfections are taken up by the perfection of wisdom, then, these five perfections have eyes. Taken up by the perfection of wisdom, these five perfections obtain the name of 'perfections'.

And so on.

In the same way elsewhere too, one should understand according to the *Sūtras*.

It has also been said:

You are not censured by any of the stainless perfections:
like the moon-streak by the stars, you are always followed.

Alternatively:

'this' refers to the composition just concluded, having *śamatha* as its topic. 'Set' means: the assemblage of its causes, and that section of the text, as they bring up wisdom. For the sake of wisdom means that wisdom, as explained earlier, is its purpose or goal. This is because, wisdom manifests in a mental continuum

purified by *śamatha*, like crops sprout in a purified field. As it is said in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*:

Moreover, what is the greatness of this *śamatha*? It is the power to give birth to the knowledge things as they are. Since

'Someone with *samādhi* knows things as they are' - thus said the Sage.

This also, has been said in the *Dharmasangīti*:

For a mind in *samādhi* there is seeing of things as they are. For a Bodhisattva who sees things as they are there occurs great compassion towards living beings. 'I should cause this door of *samādhi* to arise in all living beings.' He, prompted by that great compassion, fulfilling the trainings of higher discipline, higher mind, and higher wisdom, awakens to unexcelled perfect Buddhahood.

And so on.

The Sanskrit particle *hi*, means: *because* the Sage spoke of the set of giving and so on, or of the set made of *śamatha*, for the sake of wisdom; *hence* one should bring forth wisdom. We should join the sentences in this way. Bring forth means to cause to manifest, to realise directly; to cultivate, to practice; or to cause to increase.

That wisdom is again twofold: as cause and as result. The causal one is also twofold, either of a Bodhisattva practicing from conviction or of one, who has entered the grounds. The one as result, on the other hand, is endowed with all the best aspects, and has the nature of realising the emptiness of all *dharma*s through the *yoga* of no sign.[170]

In this regards, at first the causal one, made of listening, contemplation and cultivation, through gradual practice, brings about the wisdom of one who has

entered the grounds. The latter then, obtains higher and higher grounds and thus increases in excellence until the removal of both obscurations: it brings forth the wisdom, which has the nature of Buddhahood, wherein the entire net of constructs is removed.

Then he says: with a wish to remove suffering. Suffering, either in the living beings included in the five realms or in oneself, is *samsāric*. It has the nature of birth, illness, old age and death, and is characterised as disjunction with what is dear and conjunction with its opposite and also, loss of the gain one looked for. In brief, it is the five aggregates of appropriation in themselves. Its removal: *nirvāṇa*, pacification. This means the complete cutting away, having the nature of not arising again. With a wish, a longing, for that: meaning, a strong desire.

Thus, someone who has distorted notions, by the force of attachment to superimposing existence upon the unreal, grasps at a self and what belongs to a self. Due to such grasping, the group of afflictions generated by misplaced mental activity is born; and from that, *karman*; from that, birth; and from that, illness, old age, death, grief, lamentation, pain, depression and the secondary afflictions are born. In this way, there is the arising of this mere heap of suffering.

One then observes such dependent arising in this way, in its normal direction, through perfect wisdom. Moreover, he sees it as devoid of a self or an owner; as having the same aspect of a magical display, a mirage, a city of *Gandharvas*, a dream or a reflected image, and so on; and hence, as being ultimately without essence. Then, due the perfect cognition of things as they are, since this is by its nature a counteragent, the limbs of ignorance and becoming, which have the nature of delusion, cease; and from the cessation of ignorance, the compositional factors, which have that as their condition, cease. In this way, due

to the cessation of whatever precedes and exists as a cause, one should understand the cessation of whatever follows as an effect, up to birth: and from that, illness, old age, death, grief, lamentation, pain, depression and the secondary afflictions cease. Thus the cessation of this mere heap of suffering occurs.

In this context, ignorance, craving and appropriation are included in the section of afflictions. Compositional factors and becoming are included in the section of *karman*. The remaining limbs are included in the section of suffering. The cessation of the prior limit and the ulterior limit is included in the section of cessation. Thus, the three sections, selfless, devoid of a self or what belong to a self, come about when joined to coming about or vanish when joined to vanishing, similar in nature to a bundle of reeds. And this will be explained extensively elsewhere, following reasoning and scripture.

Hence, one who observes through wisdom that what is compounded has the nature of a dream, a magical display and so forth, understands that all *dharma*s have no essence, and thus realises *paramārtha*: then, the entire heap of flaws, including their impressions, cease. Wisdom is therefore fit to be the cause for the pacification of all suffering.

When one analyses through reasoning and scripture, an undistorted discernment of the nature of things, is born. To show this, he explains the two truths with the words '*Samvṛti* and *paramārtha*' and so forth:

Samvṛti and *paramārtha*,

these two truths are accepted.

Tattva is not the scope of the intellect,

the intellect is called *samvṛti*. 2

The complete understanding of things as they are, is covered (*saṁvriyate*), obscured (*āvriyate*), by it, due to the obscuration of their essence³⁶⁰ and due to their illumination being obscured. Hence, it is called *saṁvṛti*. Ignorance, delusion, distortion – these are its synonyms. Ignorance superimposes the nature of a non-existent thing, and has the nature of an obscuration to seeing the own nature of things: it is fit to be *saṁvṛti*. As it was said in the *Noble Sūtra of the Rice-Stalk*:

[171] Moreover, the non-comprehension of *tattva*, the mistaken comprehension, not knowing, is ignorance.³⁶¹

And it was also said:

It shows an unreal object and occurs having obscured the real,
Ignorance, just by birth, is like the occurrence of bile disease.³⁶²

Also, the dependently arisen form of a thing, shown by that, is called *saṁvṛti*. This itself is called ‘the *saṁvṛti* truth of the worldly person’ considering that it is truth only according to the *saṁvṛti* of a worldly person. It was said that:

Delusion, due to the obscuration of essence, is *saṁvṛti*.
The only truth that appears through that is fabricated.
The Sage spoke of that as *saṁvṛti* truth,
And a fabricated thing is *saṁvṛti*.³⁶³

This *saṁvṛti* is twofold, just from the point of view of a worldly person: correct *saṁvṛti* and false *saṁvṛti*. It is as follows: any aspect of a thing, like blue and so forth, dependently arisen, when apprehended by faultless organs is truth: from the point of view of a worldly person itself. What occurs within a magical

2 This can either mean that essence (*svabhāva*) constitutes the obscuration, or that the essence, the nature of things, is being obscured. *Samvṛti* is formed by the addition of the prefix *saṁ* to the root *vṛ*, and the explanation takes advantage of this etymology.

³⁶¹ *Śālistambasūtra*.

³⁶² Vaidya mentions that this is also quoted by Vibhūticandra, but does not mention the original source of the verse.

³⁶³ *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.25.

display, a mirage, a reflected image and so on, even if dependently arisen, and what is apprehended by faulty organs, as also what is misconstrued by the philosophical conclusions of the various *Tīrthikas*,³⁶⁴ is false: from the point of view of a worldly person itself. That has been explained:

That which a worldly person comes to apprehend
with any of the six organs without fault,
is truth for the worldly person.
In this way, the rest of what is construed
is false just for the worldly person.³⁶⁵

Both of these are false for the Noble Ones with correct view, since in the state of *paramārtha*, the truth of *saṃvṛti*, is false: we will explain it with reasoning immediately after this. Therefore, the nature of things does not appear to the ignorant.

Paramārtha is the supreme (*parama*), best referent (*artha*), the non-fabricated form of things, realising which, there occurs a destruction of all afflictions attached to the subtle obscuring impressions. Its synonyms are essencelessness of all *dharmas*, emptiness, *tathatā*, authentic limit, *dharmadhātu*, and so on.³⁶⁶ the essencelessness of every dependently arisen thing is its ultimate form, because the concealed, conforming to appearance, is not fit.

³⁶⁴ *Tīrthika* is a non-Buddhist philosopher. Just like Candrakīrti, Prajñākaramati does not treat the Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools in the same way. Buddhist definitions can have conventional validity, while those of the non-Buddhists cannot: since they rely on some permanent self in order to work.

³⁶⁵ *Madhyamakāvatāra*.

³⁶⁶ 'Essencelessness' translates *niḥsvabhāvatā*. 'Authentic limit' translates *bhūtakoti*, following Sthiramati's subcommentary on *Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.16: *bhūtaṃ satyam aviparītam ity arthaḥ | koṭiḥ paryanto yataḥ pareṇānyaj jñeyam nāstīty ato bhūtakotiḥ bhūtaparyanta ucyate* || I did not translate *tathatā* because 'suchness' seems awkward and because it is a word found in English dictionaries; *dharmadhātu*, on the other hand, is interpreted in some sources (*Madhyāntavibhāga* 1.16 and commentary) as 'the ore of *dharmas*', but the usual Tibetan translation as *chos ying* suggests that this interpretation is not uniformly applicable. Hence I left it un-translated.

In this way: it is not that an existent thing as it is seen has a real essence. Since, at a subsequent time, it does not remain, while an essence, being always non-adventitious, has an unmoving form: how could the essence of something ever cease? Otherwise, it would follow that its quality of being an essence would be destroyed: and thus, it would be just essenceless.

Also, it is not that when it arises in the form of a real essence it comes from anywhere, nor that when it ceases, it goes to heap up somewhere. On the other hand, in dependence upon an assemblage of causes and conditions, it arises like an illusion, and in the absence of that, it ceases. When something is born in dependence upon an assemblage of causes and conditions, and obtains itself depending on something else, like a reflected image, where is the question of its being a real essence? [172]

Moreover, the arising of something from an assemblage of causes and condition is not ultimately possible. This is because that assemblage too, obtains its existence depending on something else, being born from another assemblage: hence, it has no essence. In this way one should understand that each and every preceding one has no essence, as it is born from the assemblage of one's own causal factors. In this case, if one agrees that the effect follows the nature of the cause, how could he accept that something with an essence arises from something without essence? As he will say:

That which is produced through an illusion and that, which is
produced through causes,
please explain: where does it come from and where does it go?

It is seen in proximity of something else and not in the latter's
absence.

In that fabrication, same as a reflected image, how could there be any reality?³⁶⁷

It was also said:

What is born through conditions is sure unborn; its arising is not there with an essence.

What depends on conditions is called empty. One who knows emptiness is not heedless.³⁶⁸

In the same vein:

Just from empty *dharma*s empty *dharma*s come about.³⁶⁹

And also, not even the smallest bit of birth is fit, for a thing: whether through connection with a cause which is itself, or something else, or both; or from connection to a non-cause.³⁷⁰

It is as follows: if their own nature were the cause of the birth of things, it should be either already accomplished or not. Then, for something which is already accomplished and exists, there is no causality upon oneself: as it is completely accomplished, what more would it have to do? On the other hand, something which has yet to arise has no other essence but to be unaccomplished; and for that which is one, there are no parts. Also, its essence cannot be ascribed to something else, which is to arise later, since when the first thing is accomplished the other, not yet accomplished, cannot have its essence.

³⁶⁷ *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.144-145

³⁶⁸ *Anavataptahradāpasamkramaṇasūtra*

³⁶⁹ *Pratītyasamutpādayakārikā*

³⁷⁰ What follows is a refutation of arising in terms of the *catuṣkoṭi* (the four alternatives): the topic of the first Chapter of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. Nāgārjuna focuses his refutation on the Abhidharmic way of understanding causality in terms of *pratyayas*; Prajñākaramati (being a late *Mādhyamika*) implies in his refutation a broader spectrum of Indian philosophies.

Therefore there is no arising of anything from oneself as already accomplished. And also in reference to the position of arising from oneself, one's own nature being previously arisen is impossible for anything whatsoever, since it would imply the fault of one thing resting on another, *ad infinitum*. Also, something whose essence is yet to be accomplished is like a plant in the sky and is devoid of any capability: it cannot become the cause of one's own arising. Otherwise, this would imply that even a hare's horn could give birth to one's essence.

The position of 'from something other' is also not fit: it would follow that darkness may arise even from the sun, or anything from anything else, since both those things that give birth and those who do not, are equally other in respect to the intended effects. Even the restriction that what gives birth and its product should be one, in terms of one continuum, does not in reality hold together: it is a mental construct in reference to an effect yet to arise. And the conventional usage of 'effect' and so on, is not according to how things are when in reference to *dharma*s placed in the future. Since, only in future it may be observed whether their referents essentially do exist. Also, in the state of being seeds, the otherness of the seed in respect to the present sprout is only a construct: the existence of the effect in the cause will be refuted later. [173] Where even the presently seen form does not withstand analysis, why speculate about something possible in the future, and the like?

Even the position of 'from both' is not fit, because it would imply the combined faults explained in reference to each of the previous positions. Also, because as long as the effect is not yet arisen, a cause having the nature of both identity and difference is ultimately non-existent. While, once it has arisen, there is nothing to give birth to: therefore, how could there be any function, for a cause having the form of both?

Nor is it the option of 'from no cause': since this is a *prasajya* type of negation, 'from no cause' is not fit. If they had no causes, it would follow that existent things may not have restrictions of place and time; or, their constant existence or non-existence would follow. And, those who wish to obtain something would not attend to the proper means for its obtainment: the causality of *pradhāna*, a Lord and so forth will be refuted later.³⁷¹ Therefore, existent things do not obtain their own-existence from without causes.

Thus, neither from themselves, others, both, or from without causes, do existent things with real essences arise. As it is said:

Neither from themselves nor from other, nor from both or from no
cause,
are anywhere any existents whatsoever indeed found to be
arisen.³⁷²

Also, through the analysis of being in essence one or many, all existent things lack an essence and therefore are not essentially real. Therefore, being like a dream, a magical display, a reflected image, and so on, the mere relation of having something as a condition may be there, attractive as long as it is not analysed. In respect to this, what is the use of being attached to existence, causing all suffering? Thus, this is the essence of what is intended:

These existent things born from oneself or other have in fact no
essence,
as they do not have the nature of being one nor many, like a
reflected image.³⁷³

³⁷¹ *Pradhāna* or *prakṛti* is a *Sāṃkhya* term and is later taken up in the context of refuting that system. A Lord here means a creator God, mainly defended by the *Nyāya* system and later refuted in that context.

³⁷² *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 1.2

³⁷³ *Madhyamakālaṃkārikā* 1

In this way, only essencelessness remains as the very ultimate (*pāramārthika*) nature of all existent things. That itself, being the main aim (*artha*) of a human being is called *paramārtha*, the excellent purpose.

Even to this, one should not become attached. Otherwise, whether it is attachment to existence or attachment to emptiness, it makes no difference whatsoever: both of them are *saṃvṛti*, as they are in nature constructs. Also, non-existence, its essence being construed, has no nature of its own whatsoever. And it is not that non-existence is in nature the cessation of existence: since, cessation has no essence. Moreover, if existence had itself some essence, then non-existence, being in nature the negation of the former, could be there. But existence has no essence, as it has surely been made understood. Therefore, there is nothing whatsoever going by the name of 'non-existence' and having the form of the cessation of existence. And also, when it has been made understood, in the way explained, that existence and non-existence are not there, it is not possible to have the nature of a mixture of the two; nor, of the negation of the two: since, all misconstructions are linked to the misconstruction of existence itself. When the latter is removed, all of these are undone with a single stroke. Therefore:

Not existent, not non-existent, not existent and non-existent, and
not even as neither of the two

[174] should anything be regarded as an object of attachment. That was said in the *Noble Perfection of Wisdom*:

Subhūti said: here, Long Lived Śāradvatīputra, a son or daughter of noble family who follows the *bodhisattva*'s vehicle, not skilled in means, distinctly cognises that 'form is empty' and has attachment. He distinctly cognises that 'feeling is empty' and has attachment. He distinctly cognises that 'notion is empty' and has attachment. He distinctly cognises that 'formations are empty' and has attachment. He distinctly cognises that 'consciousness is empty' and has attachment. In the same way, he distinctly cognises that

eye, ear, sense of smell, tongue, body, mind, up to 'the emptiness of all *dharma*s is empty' and has attachment.

And so forth.

It was also said:

The teaching of the ambrosia of emptiness is to vanquish all mental constructs.

If one has grasping even for that, you set him aside.³⁷⁴

Not existent, not non-existent, not existent and non-existent, and not even as neither of the two,

Mādhyamikas know *tattva* as devoid of the four alternatives.³⁷⁵

In this way, we see the entire universe as devoid of the four alternatives, pacified from the beginning; due to its nature as non-arisen, un-ceased, no cutting off, nor permanence, it is devoid of elaboration and hence like the sky, with no place for attachments.

These two truths are accepted: what are those? '*Samvṛti* and *paramārtha*', this should be linked to what follows it. Just like in the sentence *bhūtam iyaṁ brāhmaṇī, āvapaṇam iyaṁ muṣṭikā*. *Samvṛti* is one undistorted truth, and, *paramārtha* is another truth. The word *and* puts them together as having the same force merely in terms of being truths. Among these, the *samvṛti* truth has a non-false form for the worldly person, and, *paramārtha* truth is truth, undeceiving *tattva* for the Noble Ones: this is the difference. In this way, the word *and* is also fit as having the sense of showing a difference.

This is being said: all of these existent things, inner or external, are born bearing two natures: the one of *samvṛti* and the one of *paramārtha*. Among these, one has its self-existence manifested as the object of the false vision of ordinary

³⁷⁴ *Lokātītastava* 21

³⁷⁵ *Subhāṣitasamgraha*, *Saraha*

people: their eyes are covered by the darkness of ignorance, and they see non-existence things. The other, has its nature present as the object of the perfect vision of Noble Ones: they know *tattva*, their eyes of perfect cognition had the cataract of ignorance removed by the collyrium of discrimination. Thus, all referents of words bear these two natures. And among these two natures, the one which is the object of immature people with false vision is *saṃvṛti* truth. On the other hand, the one which is the object of those who have realised *tattva* and have perfect vision, is *paramārtha* truth. This is the explanation given by those who know the *śāstras*. As someone said:

All things bear two forms, which obtain their being by perfect or false vision:

the object of those who see perfectly, is *tattva*, the one of those who see falsely, is called *saṃvṛti* truth.³⁷⁶

[175] Hence it is fit to interpret *two* as the collection of two things. 'Are accepted' means that they are regarded or opined to be there. By whom? By the Blessed Buddhas whose intellects have their obscurations removed, and by the *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas* and *bodhisattvas* who follow their path. These only are the two truths and there is no other truth: for the purpose of this type of ascertainment too, the word *and* is fit. As it was said:

The Buddhas' teaching of the Dharma rests on two truths:
the *saṃvṛti* truth of the worldly and the truth of *paramārtha*.³⁷⁷

In the *Pitāputrasamāgama* also it is said:

These are the two truths that Those Who Understand the World
saw by themselves without hearing from others:
saṃvṛti and also *paramārtha*,
and no third truth whatsoever is established.

³⁷⁶ *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.23

³⁷⁷ *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.8

Opponent | Indeed, the Four Noble Truths, defined as suffering, arising, cessation and the path, have been told by the Blessed One in the *Abhidharma*. Then how is it that 'there are only two truths'?

Reply | That is true. But on the other hand, according to the tendencies and expectations of the people to be guided, those were told by dividing the two themselves into four: since, the four are included in these very two. It is in this way: the truths of suffering, arising and the path, having the nature of *saṃvṛti*, are included in *saṃvṛti* truth; the truth of cessation on the other hand is within *paramārtha* truth. Therefore, there is no contradiction whatsoever.

This may occur to someone:

Opponent | *Saṃvṛti*'s is itself manifested by ignorance and hence has the nature of a superimposition of what is not there; also, it is torn a hundred times through analysis: how can it be a truth?

Reply | That also, is true. On the other hand, following the tendencies of worldly people it is called 'truth': it is here understood that *saṃvṛti* truth is only within the worldly. Adjusting to them, even the Blessed Ones, not intending to consider *tattva*, speak in that very way of '*saṃvṛti* truth'. Just because of this the respected *Ācārya* has in his *śāstra* specified '*saṃvṛti* truth of the worldly person'. But in fact, *paramārtha* is the only one truth: thus, there is no harm. As was said by the Blessed One:

One only, o Monks, is the highest truth: *nirvāṇa*, who has an undeceiving quality, while all formations are false and have the quality of deception.

It has been said: 'These two truths'. Among these, *saṃvṛti* truth is for those whose minds are submerged by ignorance, because it has that same nature. This

is now understood. On the other hand, it is not known what is the nature and defining trait of *paramārtha* truth. Hence its nature should be explained.

Thus he says: *tattva* is not the scope of the intellect. It is not the scope, the object, of the intellect: of any knowledge, because it crossed beyond the nature of being an object of whichever knowledge. Because, it cannot be made the object of any intellect, by any means whatsoever. Therefore, how can one make its nature understood?

It is as follows: the *tattva* of *paramārtha* truth is by nature completely free of any elaboration. As it is of any adjunct, how could one see it through any construct whatsoever? And, what has the nature of having crossed beyond constructs is not the object of words. Because words, born from constructs, cannot engage in what is not the object of intellects with constructs. [176] Therefore, lacking all constructs or expressions, not superimposed, nor obscured, the ineffable *tattva* of *paramārtha*: how can it be made understood? Nevertheless, as a favour to worthy listeners, appropriating some utter construct, something is said in terms of through *saṃvṛti* by means of indication and example.

Just like:

A person with an eye-disease, by force of that disease, sees the entire space of the sky adorned by nets of hair; he even pushes them away from his face. Seeing him acting in this manner, another thinks: 'What is he doing?', and approaches him. Although his eye is intent upon the hair perceived by the other, he does not perceive the shape of hairs; nor does he misconstrue existence, non-existence, and further specifications in reference to such hairs. Moreover, when that person with an eye-disease makes one's opinion known to the other as 'I see hairs here', then, for the sake of removing his mental construct he tells him things as they

are: 'There are no hairs here'. He has spoken a sentence, only bent upon a negation, in accord with the one with the eye-disease perceives. But it is not that he, even making things understood in this way, has performed any negation or affirmation. And as for the hairs' *tattva* that the healthy person sees: the one with the eye-disease does not see it.

In the same way:

Immature ones, who do not see *tattva* due to their eye-disease of ignorance, perceive things having the nature of the aggregates, bases, entrances and so forth. Such is their form in terms of *saṃvṛti*. While the nature, according to which the Buddhas, the Blessed Ones, whose impressions from ignorance are entirely removed, see those very aggregates and so forth, as those without eye-disease would see hairs; *that* is their *paramārtha* truth. As the expert in the *śāstra* said:

That which is construed due to the influence of an eye-disease
in the form of hairs and the like, that is just false.
The nature according to which one with pure vision sees
is *tattva*: know this to be the case even in this context.³⁷⁸

In this way, even though inexpressible as per *paramārtha*, the *tattva* of *paramārtha*, by means of an example and having taken up *saṃvṛti*, has been somehow spoken of. But in fact, it cannot be explained: it is in nature bereft of any conventional usage in terms of *saṃvṛti*. As it was said:

How can the syllable-less the dharma,
be heard or be taught?
Yet, the syllable-less intent
is heard and taught through superimposition.

Therefore, remaining only within the truth of conventional usages, *paramārtha* is taught. And, from understanding the teaching of *paramārtha*, comes the

³⁷⁸ *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.29

realisation of *paramārtha*: since one is the means for the other. As it was said in the *śāstra*:

Without relying upon conventional usage, *paramārtha* is not taught.

Without relying upon *paramārtha*, *nirvāṇa* is not realised.³⁷⁹

[177] In this way, *saṃvṛti* is the means to teach *paramārtha*, and the realisation of *paramārtha* is what is to be got through such means: since it cannot be taught otherwise.

Opponent | Well then, such a thing also, such an object of the intellection: is it not *paramārtha*?

Reply | To this he says: intellect is called *saṃvṛti*. All intellect indeed is *saṃvṛti*, since due to having a non-support as its support it is by nature a construct, and any construct has surely the nature of ignorance: since, it apprehends something unreal. As it was said:

A construction in itself comes to have the form of ignorance.

Ignorance is *saṃvṛti*. Therefore, surely no intellect apprehending the form of *paramārtha* makes ultimately (*paramārthataḥ*) any sense. Otherwise, being apprehensible by the intellect, which obscured by *saṃvṛti*, its quality of being *paramārtha* would be lacking. Since, *paramārtha* is in reality not the object of a *jñāna* obscured by *saṃvṛti*. In this respect, it was said in the *Āryasatyadvayāvatāra*:

If indeed, Devaputra, according to *paramārtha*, *paramārtha* truth could become object of body, speech or mind, it could not be counted as *paramārtha* truth: that would only be *saṃvṛti* truth. On the other hand, Devaputra, *paramārtha* truth has gone beyond all conventional usages, has no specification, is not arisen, not ceased, devoid of expressed and expression, knowable and knowledge, up

³⁷⁹ *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.20

to: *paramārtha* has gone beyond being an object of the knowledge of the Omniscient Ones, endowed with all best aspects.

And so on.

Therefore, it is surely not the object of any mental construct, because specifications like: existence or non-existence, being self or other, truth or untruth, eternality or discontinuity, permanence or impermanence, happiness or suffering, purity or impurity, self or no self, empty or non-empty, something to be characterised and a characteristic, being one or another, arising or ceasing, and so forth; are not possible for *tattva*. They have the quality of being obscured by *saṃvṛti*. This was said by the Blessed One in the *Pitāputrasamāgama*:

And just this much should be known: *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha*. This has been well seen, understood and directly realised by the Blessed one, in terms of being empty. Therefore he is called Omniscient. Among these, *saṃvṛti* has been seen by the *Tathāgata* according to how the world goes. That which moreover is *paramārtha*, is ineffable, not cognisable nor perfectly cognisable, not to be known, not taught, not shown, up to: no action, no cause; up to: no obtainment, no non-obtainment, no happiness, no suffering, no fame or lack of fame, no form, no lack of form, and so forth.

Thus, the Blessed One, whose inner self is illumined by the shining of *jñāna* pervading the expanse of infinite things, said the truth of *paramārtha* to be without the specificities of all conventional things, and devoid of any adjunct. Hence this is only to be personally experienced by the Noble Ones in terms of one's own experience: just that is here the valid means of knowledge. The *saṃvṛti* truth, on the other hand, is shown having resorted to worldly, conventional usage. Therefore, in this way, having, through this type of distinction a perfect cognition of the two truths, undistorted discrimination of the *dharma*s is born.

Having thus settled truth as twofold, through the distinction of *saṃvṛti* and *paramārtha*, showing that persons too are only of two types with jurisdiction over either, he says: ‘In respect to that’, and so forth:

In respect to that, we see two types of persons:

the *yogin* and the unrefined.

Of the two, the unrefined person

is refuted by the *yogic* person. 3

‘In respect to that’ means either among those two truths of *saṃvṛti* or *paramārtha*. Someone has jurisdiction, is placed within, either of those. This means: one perceives either of those truths. *Loka* here means a person. ‘Two types’ means twofold: the knower of either *saṃvṛti* or *paramārtha* as truth. ‘Person’ here is a word for many entities and means two groups of that. [178] ‘We see’ means we understand to be there, through reasoning and scripture. How are they of two types? To this he says: ‘the *yogin* and the unrefined’. *Yoga* means *samādhi*, defined as the non-apprehension of any *dharma*, and one who has *yoga* is called a *yogin*: this is one type of group. Thus, non-refinement is ignorance and craving, the cause for engaging in *saṃsāra*: one, who has that, is called ‘unrefined’. In the Sanskrit, the suffix *ka* is added to *prākṛta* with no further meaning, thus ‘the unrefined person’ (*prākṛtako lokaḥ*) refers to the second group. Among these two, the *yogin* sees the main *tattva* without distortion, while the unrefined sees a distorted *tattva* of things, as he is in error.

This may occur to someone:

Opponent | Since each of them, in his own way, does see *tattva*, who among the two is in error, so that only he may be refuted by the other? And, which of the two is refuted by which?

Reply | To this he says: ‘The unrefined’ and so forth. ‘Of the two’ is in the Sanskrit expressed by a 7th *Vibhakti* indicating a collection and in the sense of ascertainment. ‘Of the two’ means that among those two persons, the *yogin* and the unrefined, the unrefined person is ascertained from within the collection as having an unrefined nature. And, having being ascertained he ‘is refuted’: thus the refutation is affirmed.

By whom? To this he says: ‘by the *yogin*’. A person who is a *yogin* is himself a *yogic* person, and the other is refuted by him: thus it is settled which one is the distorted mind. How? ‘By superior intellect’ should be joined to this. On the other hand, the *yogin* is not refuted by the unrefined.

The following is here opined:

The cognition, wherein confusion places real existence, of someone whose eye are affected by a disease and who sees inexistent nets of hair and the like, is refuted by: the knowledge of someone without the disease, apprehending the *tattva* of things as they in fact are. On the other hand, it is not that the knowledge of the latter is likewise refuted by the former.

Similarly:

The cognition of the unrefined, whose eye of intellect is flawed by the disease of the stains of ignorance, and who apprehends a distorted nature of things, is refuted by: the knowledge of the *yogic* person. In his eyes of *jñāna* without outflows, the water of wisdom has cleansed away all stains; he knows the *tattva* of things. On the other hand, the *yogin*’s cognition is not refuted by the other’s cognition.

This also has been said:

What is apprehended by those, whose eyes are diseased,
does not refute the cognition of those without eye-diseases.
In the same way, by the intellect of those who are obscured by a
stained knowledge,
there is no refuting of a stainless intellect.³⁸⁰

Therefore, it is the cognition of the unrefined that is in error: hence, it is refuted.

Then, is it that only the unrefined are refuted by the *yogins*, or some *yogins* also?

To this he says 'Due to sharper' and so on:

Due to sharper intelligence, superior and superior *yogins*
refute other *yogins* as well,

Yogins too are refuted, by some other *yogins*. Not only the unrefined are: this is intended by 'as well'. How are those who refute? 'Superior and superior': those who are better and better, those who have obtained excellence by acquiring specific qualities placed in different levels of superiority. Excelling more and more, is the sense. Those who in comparison to them have lesser qualities and are lower and lower are refuted, are surpassed in terms of greatness of knowledge and so forth. How? 'Due to sharper intelligence': 'due' to 'intelligence', *jñāna* or wisdom, being sharper, excelling due to the removal of more and more obscurations. And, this is only an indication: it is also due to sharper meditation, *samādhi*, absorption, and so on. It is as follows:

³⁸⁰ *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.27

In comparison to the qualities of knowledge and so forth of a *bodhisattva* who has obtained the first ground called Joyful, the qualities of knowledge, might and so on, of a *bodhisattva* who has obtained the subsequent second ground, called Stainless, do excel. [179] The same should also be understood for others, who have obtained subsequently higher grounds. Similarly one should consider the refutation of those who have respectively obtained the first meditation and the others, up to: the refutation of those with outflows by those without outflows.

This may occur to someone:

Opponent | Even if there might be some superiority in the intelligence of the *yogins*, how can it be made understood that the cognition of the unrefined is in error?

Reply | To this he says: ‘through an example accepted by both’, and so on:

through an example accepted by both.

For the sake of a task, there is no analysis.³⁸¹ 4

‘By both’ means: *yogins* and unrefined. ‘Accepted’, regarded; ‘through’ that ‘example’, an indication. The example of an illusion, a mirage, a city of *Gandharvas*, a reflected image and the so forth, spoken of in the *Sūtras* by the Blessed One, is established for both of them as referring to essencelessness. Because, the essencelessness of all *dharma*s, is made understood in terms of being similar to that example.

³⁸¹ The verse could be read as a continuous sentence, but I split it in accordance with Prajñākaramati’s commentary.

It is as follows: things like form and the rest, whose nature is understood by all people, are established as essenceless only for the *yogins*, since they realise the truth of *paramārtha*. On the other hand, those which are apprehended in a dream, a magical display and the like, are so even for the unrefined. Therefore, in respect to these, for both groups there is no contention and hence the quality of being an example is unhindered. *Mīmāṃsakas* and others consider that there are real things which themselves appear as they are: like place, time, and so forth. These have been refuted elsewhere: hence their opinion is not cast out here. Others, though, are of our own herd, and yet think that mind only is ultimately existent, as it appears in dreams and so on. They too later, when the occasion comes, will be refuted by refuting self-awareness.³⁸²

What is established through reasoning is surely established for both. Therefore, by such an example it is established that, due to grasping at a distorted nature of things, the knowledge of the unrefined is in error. Even in the case of *yogins*, one should explain as fit, in a similar manner.

Opponent | Well, if the *tattva* of things is that all existent things are without essence; how is it that Bodhisattvas, even though they know this *tattva*, with a wish to rescue all beings and for the sake of completing the accumulations, engage in giving and so forth? Since, these too, are without essence.

Reply | To this he says: 'For the sake of a task, there is no analysis.' 'A task' is something to be accomplished or taken up. It is called a result. 'For the sake' of that means: because of that. 'There is no analysis', because one engages in the cause of that, just without analysis. Even for things that are in that way, since

³⁸² This is an important comment, to understand the proper place of the refutation of *svasaṃvedanā*. Prajñākaramati highlights how the refutation of reflexive awareness has the purpose of refuting an ultimate mind.

we find the restriction of one thing depending upon another, there is no contradiction to the relationship of cause and result. This is what is being said:

Giving and so forth, being by nature like an illusion and so on, have no essence. Nevertheless, when practiced through the purification of the three points by applying care and so forth, even though they are such, they become causes for the realisation of *paramārtha*. Because they are means to that, and because, dependent arising is inconceivable. Only by a cause like this, such result is realised, since one is the means to the other. That was said:

The truth of conventional usage is the means,
while the truth of *paramārtha* is what is to be obtained.³⁸³

And, it has to be necessarily this way. Otherwise, how, through the practice of the path, could a stainless state arise from one with stains, or one without mental constructs from one which has them? It is because, from the perspective of *paramārtha*, one has the nature of the other.

This is the same for other instances as well: and since all *dharma*s are ultimately with no essence, a result similar to the cause is accepted in all cases. Therefore, even from a cause within *saṃvṛti* and essence-less, the result is the very realisation of essencelessness. Otherwise, how could the uncompounded *nirvāṇa* be obtained from a compounded path?

[180] Therefore, giving and the rest, even if in reality essenceless, are taken up by Bodhisattvas, with compassion towards all beings, for the sake of realising the *paramārtha-tattva*: as there is no other way to realise *paramārtha*. Hence, engaging in giving and so forth is not prevented. In the same way one should explain that those who wish to obtain desirable results and avoid the undesirable,

³⁸³ *Madhyamakāvatāra* 6.80

engage in what is skilful and abstain from what is not. This is going to be clarified again, later.

This may occur to someone:

Opponent | If *yogins* understand the form of things as an illusion and so forth, and an unrefined person too understands the same, where is then the contention?

Reply | To this he says 'Existents are seen' and so forth:

Existents are seen by a person

and construed too as *tattva*,

not as an illusion:

hence the debate between a *yogin* and that person. 5

'By a person' means by an unrefined person. Having obtained causes and conditions they come about (*bhavanti*), they get their own form, hence they are called 'existents' (*bhāvāḥ*). On the other hand, they have no ultimate form of their own, hence by the word 'existent' (*bhāva*) absence of own existence (*niḥsvabhāvatā*) is understood as expressed.

Not only are they 'seen' as existent in nature, but they are 'construed too as *tattva*'. They are clung to (*adhyavasīyante*) as ultimate according to the very nature they are perceived. They become objects of attachment. Because of thinking: 'The form of things that is the scope of our perception is truly real'.

'Not as an illusion', not like, on the other hand, in the way they are seen by a *yogin*: like an illusion, resembling an illusion, empty of essence; they are not

perceived to be ultimately as such. 'Hence' in this respect there is 'the debate between a *yogin* and that person', of a person versus a *yogin*. The *tattva* of things understood by the latter is not understood by the other person, hence it may be said it means instead: of a *yogin* versus that person. Because, what the latter understands is negated as being the case by the *yogin*.

This is the intended sense:

All existent things have two forms, one in terms of *saṃvṛti* and one in terms of *paramārtha*. Among these, only the one in terms of *saṃvṛti* is perceived by the worldly person, while the one in terms of *paramārtha*, by the *yogin*: this has been explained.

A person with eyes confused by the power of *mantras*, and so forth, sees only such forms as of elephants, as projected by a magician. The magician, on the other hand, sees their actual nature, being their essence and so forth. One should understand in a similar way, as fit, even in the case of the *yogin* and the other person.

Then also, this may occur to someone:

Opponent | The form of things common for all people, and capable of purposeful activity, is apprehended through direct perception as valid means: how could *that* be negated?

Reply | Considering that the other may be thinking in this way, he says 'Even the perception' and so on:

Even the perception of form and so on
is from consensus, and not from proofs.³⁸⁴

Even that which is called 'perception': like 'form and so on'. The word 'and so on' includes sound and so on, feeling and so on. That also, is from 'consensus': from customary usage, worldly talk, 'not from proofs'. Form and so on, is not real perception realised through valid means: this is the syntactical connection. Since perception and so on, are valid means only in terms of conventional usage, what is realised through them is form and so on, only in terms of *saṃvṛti*. The actual form (*tāttvikaṃ rūpaṃ*) is not to be realised through worldly means of knowledge: otherwise, it would follow that all persons understand *tattva*. As someone has said:

If what is apprehended by the senses would be in accordance with
tattva,
any fool would know *tattva*: then what would be the use of
knowing *tattva*?³⁸⁵

Therefore even perception is not realised by valid means.

[181] *Opponent* | If *tattva* as form and so on, even in direct perception, is not realised through valid means, how is it that there is consensus upon that? And if there is consensus, how is that false?

³⁸⁴ I have used the term 'proof' meaning 'valid or sound proof' to translate *pramāṇa*. The term has been recently often translated as 'valid cognition', but I think such a translation is not desirable even in a Buddhist context. Although some (of the Digṇāga/Dharmakīrti school) would indeed define *pramāṇa* as a cognition, this is not accepted by all (not, for example, by Candrakīrti). Moreover, even those philosophers that define *pramāṇa* as a type of cognition, do that in a polemical context and are aware that this is only a specific interpretation and not a common usage.

³⁸⁵ *Catuhṣṭava* 3.18

Reply | To this he says ‘Like the consensus’ and so on:

Like the consensus on the impure being pure and so on,
it is false.⁶

Just like: in reference to a woman’s body and so on, ultimately impure, an intellection of purity is born, for those whose minds are distorted by attachment to it. Due to the word ‘and so on’ the intellection of permanence and so on in reference to what is impermanent, and so forth, is included.³⁸⁶

And that, grasping something where it is not, ‘is false’. It means that is grasps falsely. The intellection in reference to form and so on is in the same way: there is no difference.

Opponent | If there is no establishment of that through perception as valid means, then it will be there through textual tradition (*āgama*). Since, in the *Sūtra* the Blessed One taught existent things as having the nature of aggregates, bases, entrances and so on, and as having the nature of momentariness, and so forth. In that respect, this has been said by the Blessed One:

All: all means, oh Brahmin, the five aggregates, the twelve entrances, the eighteen bases.

In the same vein:

All factors are momentary, where is activity for what does not stay?

³⁸⁶ This refers to a specific set of distortions described in Buddhist texts: taking what is impermanent as permanent, what is impure as pure, what is no-self as self, what is suffering as happiness. The opponent here must be a Buddhist.

Their existence is itself activity, and is itself called the doer
(*kāraka*).

And making understood a quality of momentariness or non-momentariness is not proper for what has the nature (*svabhāva*) of an illusion: things without essence have no nature whatsoever. Thus, how could they not be ultimately existent?

Reply | To this he says ‘For the sake of introducing people’ and so on:

And for the sake of introducing people

the Protector taught of ‘existents’.

In reality, they are not momentary,

and if you say ‘conventionally’, it is contradictory. 7

For the ‘people’: for beings who are attached to existence and are to be guided through the teachings on the aggregates and so forth. ‘For the sake of introducing’: into emptiness, those who are not fit for a direct teaching on emptiness, in order to engage through a gentle gradation. The word ‘and’ indicates a cause. Because, ‘existents’, defined as the aggregates, entrances and so forth, even though all *dharma*s have in reality no essence, were ‘taught’, demonstrated, by the ‘Protector’. This is the Blessed Buddha, who knows the living beings’ dispositions and so forth, protects them from the suffering of the hells and so forth and causes them to obtain the happiness of prosperity and ultimate excellence. Therefore, there is no contradiction with the *Sūtras*. As it has been said:

Just like ‘Mine’ and ‘I’ was spoken of by the Victors to accomplish
a task,

in the same way, to accomplish a task, the aggregates, entrances and bases were spoken of.³⁸⁷

Opponent | If they were not taught ultimately, how could they then be momentary? Thus he says: ‘They are not momentary’.

In reality (*tattvataḥ*), from the point of view of *paramārtha*, since they have no essence these existents are not even momentary. The teaching of momentariness and so forth is to show that nature to people to be trained (or, because such nature does not appear to people to be trained).

If ultimately they are not momentary, how is it that even in the teaching they have been said to be so? [182] Placing this in mind he says ‘If you say ‘conventionally’. If it said that they are called momentary from the point of view of *saṃvṛti*, expecting such an answer he faults it: then ‘it is contradictory’. That they are momentary according to *saṃvṛti* and not according to *paramārtha* is contradictory: it does not hold together. Because they are perceived as non-momentary, it contradicts perception. And, since those engaged in conventional usages perceive its opposite, momentariness is not the form corresponding to *saṃvṛti*.³⁸⁸

Reply | The proponent of the *siddhānta* answers: ‘The fault is not with the yogins’ *saṃvṛti*’:

The fault is not with the yogins’ *saṃvṛti*:

compared to the other person, they see *tattva*.

Otherwise, the depiction of women as impure

³⁸⁷ *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*

³⁸⁸ The following section is quite important: it shows how Abhidharmic categories can be fit in a system of graded *saṃvṛti*, hence differentiating them, by implication, from the categories offered by the non-Buddhists (which are, primarily, mistakes in terms of *saṃvṛti* itself).

could be refuted by worldly people. 8

Here there is no such flaw as a contradiction to perception. Why? Because, according to the *saṃvṛti* or conventional usage of *yogins* who have obtained *samādhi* in the selflessness of persons, there is perception in terms of momentariness.

This is what is intended: although momentariness is not perceived by the short-sighted, it is nonetheless within the scope of the *yogins*' conventional usage. Even the conventional usage of *yogins* does not escape having the nature of *saṃvṛti*, since it has been said that 'the intellect is called *saṃvṛti*' (9.2). And it is not that what is stultified by perception is ipso facto stultified, since a certain type of perception does not constitute a valid means.

Opponent | Then, how is it that, although it corresponds to *saṃvṛti*, only *yogins* see this, while the short-sighted don't?

Reply | Thus he says: 'compared to the other person, they see *tattva*'. In comparison to the other person, who is short-sighted, those *yogins* see *tattva*, see beyond the sense faculties. Such expression gives the reason. Because, they see *tattva*, therefore they understand momentariness, selflessness and so forth, even though those are not perceived by other people. Hence, the perception of the other persons does not stultify them.

And this should necessarily be accepted. Thus he says: 'Otherwise' and so forth. Otherwise, if this is not accepted, then other persons should stultify even what you yourself accept. What? 'The depiction of women as impure.' At the time of meditation on impurity, other persons should stultify the depiction, the

ascertainment, of a woman, a lovely one, as impure. There would be a contradiction with what is perceived by other persons, since the other persons apprehend the body of a woman as having a pure nature. Therefore, what is seen by *yogins* is not stultified by what is perceived by other persons. Here ‘Things as perceived by those with an eye-disease’ and so forth, should be applied as a cumulative reason.

Thus, not even from textual tradition (*āgama*) can existent things be established as *paramārtha*. It is hence certain that all *dharma*s have the nature of an illusion, a dream, and the like.

This may occur to someone:

Opponent | If the nature of being like an illusion is omni-pervasive, then even a Buddha is like an illusion and like a dream. This too has been said in the *Bhagavatī*:

When this was said, Subhūti spoke the following to those sons of gods: those living beings, oh sons of gods, are like an illusion. Those living beings, oh sons of gods, are like a dream. Therefore, an illusion and living beings: this is not two, it is made into one. All *dharma*s also, oh sons of gods, are like an illusion, like a dream. Even a Stream-Enterer is like an illusion, like a dream. [183] Even the fruit of entering the stream is like an illusion, like a dream. Similarly, a Once-Returner too, and even the fruit of once-returning; a Non-Returner too, and even the fruit of non-returning; an *Arhat* too, and even the fruit of Arhatship are like an illusion, like a dream. Even a *Pratyekabuddha* is like an illusion, like a dream. His awakening is also like an illusion, like a dream. Even a perfect, complete Buddha is like an illusion, like a dream. Perfect, complete awakening is also like an illusion, like a dream. Up to: *nirvāṇa* too, is like an illusion, like a dream. If there was any *dharma* excelling even *nirvāṇa*, that also, I say, would be like an illusion, like a dream.

In this way, how is it that from respect and disrespect merit and sin may arise?
Expecting this opinion from the opponent, he says 'How does merit' and so forth:

How does merit come from an illusion-like Jina?

Just, as it comes in case of his real existence.

If even the Blessed One is in nature comparable to an illusion, then: 'from an illusion-like' essenceless 'Jina', from the Blessed One, how, in which way, do you think there could be merit, good-deeds? Like through worship, respect, saluting the feet and so forth?

This is just a part of what is implied. How is there sin in disrespecting him?
This should be understood. It is not that by respecting or disrespecting a person produced by a magician it makes sense that merit and sin are born. Such is the other's opinion.

Reply | That has already been answered. Hence, here he asks to the other: 'Just, as it comes in case of his real existence?' Even 'in case of his real existence' in case of the Blessed One being existent from the point of view of *paramārtha*, how is there merit? The words *katham yathā* (how) should be applied to both parts. This is what is intended: Just like for someone, from an ultimately existent Jina ultimately existent merit is born, in the same way for another, from one comparable to an illusion comes illusion-like merit. Therefore there is no difference between us two, since the mere fact that one thing has another as its condition, is common to both: that very answer that you have, is also ours, nothing differs. And, it has been made understood that there is no ultimately existent nature of things established through reasoning.

Opponent | Let there be merit even from a Jina that is like an illusion. But how is *this* going to be solved? Thus he says ‘If a being is like an illusion’ and so forth:

If a being is like an illusion,
is he reborn after death? 9

Or, it can be begun in a different manner: if even a Jina is like an illusion, what to say then of living beings within *saṃsāra*? We say: They are also like that. Since, it has been said:

Those living beings, oh sons of gods, are like an illusion.

In this case, a great flaw follows: thus he says ‘If’, and so forth. ‘If a being’, someone having life, ‘is like an illusion’, has the same quality of what is by nature an illusion, ‘is he reborn after death?’ The question mark (*kim*) is either in reference to a question, or indicating impatience. Is it reborn, arisen, again? Dead means dropped from the continuity of a similar realm (*nikāyasabhāgatāyāś cyutaḥ*). The cause here should be stated, or this is not fit: since, when an illusory person disappears he does not arise again. Therefore existent things are real as *paramārtha*: it has to be accepted.

Reply | It need not be accepted. Thus he says ‘As long’, etc.:

As long as there is an assemblage of conditions,
an illusion also continues.

‘As long’, for as much time as, ‘there is an assemblage’, a collection, ‘of conditions’, of causal factors like *mantras*, herbs and so forth, of assembled causal factors; for that length of time ‘an illusion too continues’, it does not stop before that, nor does it continue after.

In this way, as long as there is the assemblage having the nature of ignorance, *karman* and craving, for that long the illusion of a living being’s continuum goes on: since, it occurs depending upon the fact that one thing has another as its condition (*idaṃpratyayatā*).

Opponent | If from the point of view of *paramārtha* there is no living being, how is it that the continuum of a living being occurs for as long as *samsāra*, while it does not cease after a short while, like an illusion does? [184]

Reply | In response, this has been said: ‘As long as there is an assemblage of conditions, it continues’, while something that does have such a thing, does not continue. Moreover: remaining for a long time is not a reason to establish something as authentic. Thus he says: ‘Why say’ and so forth:

How can a being truly exists,
solely because of a long continuum? 10

‘Long’ means persisting for a long time; a ‘continuum’ is a flow. That only, exclusively, is the meaning of ‘solely because of’ that. He asks: ‘how’? In what way does ‘a being exist’, is he to be found? ‘Truly’ means in terms of *paramārtha*.

This much, on the other hand, is the difference:

Whatever has specific causes and conditions to remain for a long time, continues for a long time. On the other hand, whatever does not have them does not continue. But it is not that according to this there is authenticity or falsity. Therefore, even when something has the nature of an illusion, rebirth is not impossible.

Opponent | If this is so, just like there is no taking of life in cases like the killing of an illusory person; similarly, it should not be there even in case of killing a person other than that: since, they don't differ in nature.

Reply | Thus he says 'There can be no sin' and so forth:

There can be no sin in harming and so forth
an illusory man, because he has no mind.

'In harming and so forth': killing and so forth an illusory man. The word 'and so forth' implies taking what is not given by him, etc.³⁸⁹ Even when lack of essence is the same, because in the continuum of an illusory man there is 'no mind', no consciousness, no sin, no non-virtue arises as taking life and so forth. *Pāpaka* (sin) here is just *pāpa*; because the particle *ka* is added in reference to the very meaning of the word. Even in respect to that man, for one who bestows strikes with a wish to kill there is definitely some non-virtue, but no taking of life.

³⁸⁹ *Prāṇātīpātavīramāṇasīkṣā* is the first vow of *śīla*, and not taking what is given is the second. It hence follows that the following discussion regards the entirety of *śīla*.

Opponent | How is there taking of life in case of someone other than the illusory man?

Reply | If one asks this, he says 'But towards' and so forth:

But if this is towards one endowed with the illusion of mind,
merit and sin can come about.11

The 'mind' itself being an 'illusion' is called 'the illusion of mind'; 'towards one endowed', joined to 'that'. This means, towards one linked to a mind, which has the nature of an illusion. The word 'but' is in the sense of a distinction from what was before. *Puṇyapāpe* (merit-sin) means 'merit and sin', those two, good deeds and bad deeds, 'come about', arise. Either help or harm (arises): from a specific assemblage there is a specific effect. Just like, even when the shape of the *gomaya* quail is the same as that of another type of quail, their nature is different due to having different causes. Similarly, here too there is no implication of the ascribed fault.

Opponent | Hitting at what has been said 'endowed with the illusion of mind' etc, the opponent says 'Since *mantras*' and so forth:

Since *mantras* and so on have no such capacity,
an illusory mind cannot come about?

'Mantras and so on': the word 'and so on' refers to herbs and so on. 'Since' these 'have no such capacity' no such function to make mind arise, 'an illusory mind cannot come about' a mind having the nature of an illusion is impossible.

Just like by the influence of *mantras* and so forth, employed by a magician and causing others' delusion, shapes of elephants and the like come about, it is not so for the mind: this is what the opponent means.

Reply | Refuting it he says 'An illusion too can be of various types', and so forth:

An illusion too can be of various types,
coming about from various conditions. 12

[185] The word 'too' is in the sense of emphasis and also indicates a distinct step. 'That illusion' is *indeed* 'of various types', it is *indeed* of various sorts. Therefore 'coming about from various conditions': that which comes about, arises, from various conditions, from causal factors of many sorts, is said to be so.

This is what is meant:

Although the word 'illusion, illusion' is the same, nevertheless, it is not that there is no difference in what causes it: since, even when things have the nature of an illusion, an effect can have various natures. Having observed a certain cause in respect to one effect, it is not fit, just because of the sameness of the word 'effect', to misconstrue that that causal factor will apply to all effects. On the other hand, something has capacity only in respect to some things, since even when there is sameness of words there can be difference in nature. Showing just this, he says 'Nowhere a single condition':

Nowhere a single condition
Has capacity in respect to all things.

No 'single condition', causal factor or cause, having obtained capacity in some respect, 'has capacity in respect to all things': it is not possible that it may have capacity, power, in respect to all effects. 'Nowhere' can mean that it is not seen anywhere: it is not seen nor accepted at any occasion, place or time. And therefore, a certain illusion obtains its existence from the capacity of *mantras* and the like; while another occurs in its greatness from beginningless *saṃsāra*, and is brought about by the influence of ignorance and so forth. Therefore, the capacity of *mantras* and the like is not in respect to all things.

All of this has been brought up after taking up the reality of things corresponding to *saṃvṛti*, which follows the usages of the world and is conjured by constructs; not from the perspective of *paramārtha*. Since, in the state of *paramārtha* there is no construct of birth, death, arising, cessation, cause, effect, existence, non-existence and so forth; as all *dharma*s are by nature in *nirvāṇa*.

Opponent | Not bearing with this, the opponent brings out another implication and says 'If someone who has ceased':

If one who is blown-off in the ultimate sense

Conventionally goes on in *saṃsāra*, 13

'One who is blown-off': devoid of arising or cessation, as he is empty of any essence. 'In the ultimate sense' means from the perspective of the truth of *paramārtha*; being appeased from the beginning, as he is by nature in *nirvāṇa*. If 'conventionally', from the point of view of *saṃvṛti* truth, which is made of constructs, he 'goes on in *saṃsāra*', if he is joined to birth, decay and death,

then this great contradiction would come about: thus he says ‘in this way even a Buddha’ and so forth:

in this way even a Buddha would continue in *saṃsāra*.

Then what is the use of the practice towards awakening?

Accepting ‘in this way’, ‘even a Buddha’ who is blown-off due to the destruction of all obscurations, ‘would continue in *saṃsāra*’, would undergo birth and so forth. Since this is the case, ‘then’, due to that reason, ‘what is the use of the practice towards awakening?’

Towards awakening means: towards Buddhahood. The practice is characterised by many hundreds of hardships, explained as giving up one’s hands, feet and head, and so forth. What would it be for? It would have no purpose, since, due what has been explained, it would yield no result. The practice is in fact resorted to for the purpose of making all *saṃsāric dharmas* cease and for the obtainment of Buddhahood, based on a collection of all good qualities. Nevertheless, if there is no cessation of *saṃsāric dharmas*, what has been accomplished by resorting to such practice? This is what is meant.

Reply | That has already been answered: by saying ‘As long as there is an assemblage of conditions’, and so on. Clarifying it once more he says ‘When conditions’, etc.:

When conditions are not cut off

Even an illusion is not cut off. 14

But due to the cutting off of conditions,

Even conventionally there is no coming about.

‘Conditions’ means causal factors. ‘When’ they ‘are not cut off’; when they are not destroyed. The particle *hi* is here used in the sense of a causal link. ‘Even an illusion’, not only *saṃsāra*: the word ‘even’ is used in the sense of adding. ‘Is not cut off’, it does not cease. ‘But due to the cutting off’, the cessation, ‘of conditions’, of causal factors, ‘even conventionally’, even from the point of view of conventional usages resting on constructs, ‘there is no coming about’, there is no movement within *saṃsāra*. [186] The cutting off of conditions, moreover, is to be understood as coming from the cessation of ignorance and the rest in due order, due to becoming familiar with *tattva*. As it has been said in the *Noble Sūtra of the Rice-Stalk*:

This being spoken, Maitreya Bodhisattva, great being, said to Long-Lived Śāriputra:

It has been said by the Blessed One, the Lord of Dharma, the Omniscient One: ‘Monks, one who sees dependent arising, sees the Dharma; one who sees the Dharma sees the Buddha’.

In this context, what is indeed dependent arising? It is this: formations have ignorance as their condition; consciousness has formations as their conditions; name and form have consciousness as their condition; the six entrances have name and form as their conditions; contact has the six entrances as its conditions; feeling has contact as its condition; craving has feeling as its condition; appropriation has craving as its condition; becoming has appropriation as its conditions; birth has becoming as its condition; decay, death, grief, lamentation, suffering, depression and attending troubles have birth as their condition. In this way, there is the arising of this mere great aggregate of suffering. In this respect: due to the cessation of ignorance, formations cease, (and so forth). In this way, there is the cessation of this mere great aggregate of suffering. This is called dependent arising. (And so forth.) One who sees this dependent arising, always constant, devoid of a living being, as it is, undistorted, unborn, unreal, un-compounded, unobstructed, support-less, auspicious, fearless, not to be consumed, and having the nature of not coming to rest, that one sees the Dharma. And one who sees the Dharma in this way, always constant, as it is, having the nature of not coming to rest,

that one sees the Buddha, the unexcelled Dharma-body. (And so forth.)

In this context, what is ignorance? In reference to these very six elements, it is the notion of oneness, the notion of a conglomeration, the notion of permanence, the notion of being perpetual, the notion of being eternal, the notion of happiness, the notion of self, the notion of a being, the notion of a life, the notion of a creature, the notion of one born of Manu, the notion of a descendant of Manu, the notion of 'I' and 'mine'. Lack of knowledge, manifold as described and more, is called ignorance. In this way, when there is ignorance, attachment, aversion and delusion towards objects occur.

In this context, those attachment, aversion and delusion towards objects are called formations, having ignorance as their condition. The specific cognition of a thing is called consciousness. The four great elements and that which depends upon them is form, once they are placed into one group. The four formless aggregates which are born together with consciousness are called name: that is name and form. The faculties that rest upon name and form are the six entrances. Contact is coming together of three *dharma*s. The experience of contact is feeling. Exertion towards feeling is craving. Great craving is appropriation. The *karman* which gives birth to a new existence and is born from appropriation is becoming. The manifestation of the aggregates, having becoming as its cause, is birth. The maturation of the aggregates brought forth by birth is decay. The disappearance of the aggregates is death. When a dying person, who is foolish and has intense attachment, burns inside: that is grief. Speech brought about by grief is lamentation. The experience of harm linked to the five consciousnesses is suffering. The mental suffering linked to an act of attention towards suffering is depression. Other similar secondary afflictions are called attendant troubles.

In this context, 'ignorance' has the sense of a great darkness. 'Formations' is in the sense of conception. 'Consciousness' is in the sense of cognising. 'Name and form' is in the sense of reflection. 'Six entrances' is in the sense of being doors to what comes in. 'Contact' is in the sense of coming into contact. 'Feeling' is in the sense of experience. 'Craving' is in the sense of being thirsty for something. 'Appropriation' is in the sense of an act appropriation. 'Becoming' is in the sense of giving birth to a

new existence. [187] 'Birth' is in the sense of making the aggregates appear. 'Decay' is in the sense of the maturation of the aggregates. 'Death' is in the sense of disappearance. 'Grief' is in the sense of grieving. 'Lamentation' is in the sense of lamentation through speech. 'Suffering' is in the sense of bodily torment. 'Depression' is in the sense of mental torment. 'Attendant troubles' is in the sense of secondary afflictions.

And so on.

In this way, when the conditions that have been indicated are not cut off, the entire *saṃsāra* occurs, since it is that very dependent arising in its twelve links that has the quality of being *saṃsāra*. As said by the venerable *Ācārya*:

As per its projection by afflictions and *karman*, the continuum becomes gradually old and once more goes to the next world. Thus the wheel of existence is beginningless. That is dependent arising, having twelve limbs and three divisions.³⁹⁰

On the other hand, when the conditions are cut off, by all means there would be no continuous migration (*saṃsāraṇa*), due to the lack of its causes. Therefore, that 'even a Buddha would continue in *saṃsāra*' does not follow.

Thus, having cast away the objections of *Sautrāntikas* and others, in order to undo the opposition of the *Yogācāra*, bringing forth an objection according to that system he says 'When even erring' and so forth:

Opponent |

When even erring does not exist,
who is to apprehend the illusion? 15

³⁹⁰ *Abhidharmakośa* 3.19-20

The whole universe, having the nature of an illusion, is accepted as being empty of own-existence by the proponents of *Madhyamaka*. Even the intellection that apprehends *saṃvṛti* as having the nature of an illusion, according to you does not exist; just like what is external. In that case, ‘who is to apprehend the illusion?’ who is there to perceive, apart from a really existent cognition apprehending it? What is meant is: no-one. On the other hand, for one who accepts that one’s own mind only, existing ultimately, yet in error in terms of externality, appears in that way, there is no such flaw. This is the intended sense.

Reply | To undo all this he says ‘when an illusion is itself’, and so on:

When an illusion is itself not there for you,
then what is to be apprehended?

When an illusion itself, as something to be apprehended occurring with the aspects of a horse and so forth, is not there for you, *viññānavādin*, then what is to be apprehended, then what is here appearing? The sense is that, due to the non-existence of external referents, appearance parsed according to place and the rest, is not fit.³⁹¹

Opponent | In reference to this, anticipating the other’s intent he says ‘That is’ and so on:

That is just an aspect of the mind itself,
even though a different one truly exists.¹⁶

³⁹¹ This objection to the *Vijñaptimātratā* view is identical to that found in the *Viṃśatikā*, verse 2.

Here it has been said that the mind only, in error in terms of externality, appears in that way. Indeed, that has been said. On the other hand, even though that appearance, appearing as something to be apprehended parsed according to place and so on, is an aspect of the mind itself, of cognition itself, a different one, from the other aspect of an apprehending mind, exists: it is to be found, truly, in reality.

Reply | Even though you may have spoken accepting all of this, nevertheless it does not hold together: thus he says ‘when mind itself is the illusion’ and so forth:

When mind itself is the illusion,
what is seen by what?

Mind itself, consciousness itself, is accepted as the one who experiences. The illusion is not something other: there is no other illusion apart from the experiencing mind. Because: it is accepted that, being identical to the latter, it appears as such and such. In that case, what is seen by what, what is perceived by what? [188] There is only seeing alone, nothing to be seen. Without something to be seen there could be no seeing either, since the latter depends upon something to be seen. Therefore, nothing is seen by anything: the whole universe has become blind. This is the intended sense.

Opponent | Indeed, all of what has been said would accrue, if cognition had no self-awareness, by which self-awareness, being aware of its own nature, it may experience the appearance of the illusion and so forth as non-different from that. On the other hand, since this condition exists, there is no flaw.

Reply | Anticipating this intent of the *viññānavādin* he says:

Also, the Protector of the World said
that mind does not see mind.

When through reasoning it has been made understood that the entire universe is surely empty of own-existence, then what could actually be the essence of what? Thus, what could be the experience of what? The Blessed One also said:

All *dharma*s are empty: mind has the characteristic of emptiness.
All *dharma*s are isolated: mind has the characteristic of isolation.

Moreover: the Protector of the World, the protector and refuge of all living beings in the world, the Buddha, the Blessed One, also said, also told, what did he say? That mind does not see mind: mind does not cognise itself, because even in case of something really existent, it is not possible to act upon oneself. How is that like?

A sword-blade cannot cut itself,
and so it is for the mind.¹⁷

Even a very sharp sword-blade, the blade of a sword, cannot cut, cannot slice itself, its own body, as it would cut something else, because of the impossibility of acting upon oneself. So too it is for the mind. Like for the sword-blade, mind also does not see itself – this should be joined to the sentence. In the same way, that very same cognition is not fit to have three natures of its own: something to be experienced, something which experiences, and the experience itself. Since, it is not fit for one part-less thing to have three natures. About that, this was said in the *Noble Ratnacūḍasūtra*:

Searching for the mind, he does not see a mind inside. He does not see a mind outside. He does not see a mind in the aggregates. He does not see a mind in the bases. He does not see a mind in the entrances. Not seeing the mind, he investigates the stream of mind:

where from is the arising of mind? When there is a support, mind arises. Then, is the mind different from the support, or that very support is the mind itself? If the support and the mind are different, there would be two minds. If that very support is the mind, is it then that mind sees the mind? The mind surely does not see the mind. Just like it is not possible to cut a sword-blade with the same sword-blade, and it is not possible to touch a finger-tip with the same finger-tip, in the same way to see the mind with the same mind(...)

And so on.

Opponent | To this, the proponent of Mind-Only, refuting the impossibility of action upon oneself in order to support one's position, brings up an example and says: 'Like a light' and so forth:

Like a light, it illumines itself. If so,

Like a light, a lamp, illumines, makes clear, itself: one's features. A lamp is taken up to perceive objects like a pot and so forth when they are covered in darkness. It is surely not that in the same way one takes up another lamp to illuminate a lamp. On the other hand, while illuminating a pot and the like, it also illuminates itself. Similarly it should be understood for our topic, self-awareness. [189] And also, no impossibility is seen: this should be added everywhere. Therefore, just like in the case of a lamp, there is no impossibility.

Reply | If so, if you think in this way, then: you cannot say that. Why? Thus he says: 'A light' and so forth:

A light is surely not illumined,
because it was not covered by darkness.¹⁸

A light is surely not illumined, is not made clear like a pot and so forth, because it was not covered by darkness; it was not enclosed within obscuring darkness.

Illumination is the removal of a present obscuration. Therefore, the illumination of a pot and the like is fit, while the illumination of what is not present is not fit, as it does not exist. Thus, a light is surely not illuminated. Then, due to dissimilarity, the example of a lamp does not prove what is to be proven.

One may say:

Opponent | By 'itself' and so on, it is not being said that a light illumines itself, like a pot and the like, being covered by darkness. What is being said is only that it has independence from others in respect to its own nature. Showing just this he says 'Unlike a crystal' and so forth:

Unlike a crystal, something blue
does not depend on others for its blueness:
thus, something is seen to depend on others
and something not to.¹⁹

The Sanskrit particle *hi* indicates consequentiality. A crystal stone, itself not blue, depends for its blueness on some other adjunct that may cause the arising of the quality of being blue: like a blue leaf, and so forth. Thus, in this way, something like a pot is seen to depend on others: to be illumined in dependence upon a lamp and the like. On the other hand, something like a lamp and so forth, is seen, is apprehended, as being independent from others: as having the nature of self-illumination. What we wish to say is no more than this.

Reply | To such a specification, shown in this way by the *viññānavādin*, the proponent of the *siddhānta*, refuting what was shown as an example – blue itself being independent from others in respect to its own blueness – he says ‘Not being blue’ and so forth:

Not being blue, that would not
make itself blue by itself.³⁹²

This also is not a similar example: even a blue thing, just like a crystal, is not independent from others. Because, for that state it depends upon one’s own causes and conditions. Moreover, when could it be independent? If it were to arise from its own cause as not blue only; and then, not depending upon others for that state, if it were to make itself blue on its own accord. Yet, this is not the case. Since: ‘not being blue’ means being devoid of the quality of being blue. The negative particle *na* denies. ‘That’ refers to the hypothetical blue object. ‘Blue’: endowed with the quality of being blue. ‘Itself’: one’s own features. ‘By itself’: on its own accord. ‘Would not make’ means it could not make. As before, this is due to the impossibility of acting upon oneself. Therefore, even for a blue thing there is no independence from others in respect to its own blueness: just as it is for the crystal. Thus, it is not that even a crystal stone, having in reality certain fixed features, takes up the colour blue in the proximity of certain adjuncts. [190] On the other hand, it is due to being the characteristic of all of its appropriation. Moreover, from the cessation of prior own features of

³⁹² Here I do not follow Vaidya’s proposed emendations, since I disagree with his statement that his version is confirmed by the commentary. In fact, I believe the commentary supports the reading *anīlatve na tannīlaṃ kuryād ātmānam ātmanā* | See the following section of Prajñākaramati: *yataḥ anīlatve nīlaguṇarahitatve sati | neti niśedhayati | tad iti nīlābhimatam vastu | nīlaṃ nīlaguṇayuktam ātmānam svarūpaṃ ātmanā svayam eva na kuryāt na kartum śaknoti [...]* | As usual, Prajñākaramati encases the words of the verse within the commentary and gives glosses and expansions. Vaidya’s version, though, does not find a place in the commentary, as far as I can tell. Since my concern is primarily with Prajñākaramati’s commentary, I follow this reading: the numbering of the verses works accordingly.

the specific helping causes which are adjuncts to blueness, *another* crystal stone, coloured with the quality of blueness, arises: this is the *siddhānta*. Therefore, for both things, dependence upon causes and conditions in respects to that quality is common: even in case of what we are concerned with, which has to be proven, there is no difference.

Opponent | Well, what has been said is actually favourable to us:

Having the nature of being distinguished from the insentient, from one's own causes and conditions, and not depending on another illumination, cognition arises: that very arising is called self-illumination, self-awareness. Just this has been established even by you, through the analysis of the nature of blue. Even the lamp was taken as an example in no more than this sense.

Moreover, we do not accept the self-illumination of cognition according to the division of object, agent and action; because, for one existent thing three natures as object and so forth are not fit. Therefore, even in case of a refutation through the division of action and so forth, there would be no refutation for us: because it would not harm self-illumination as being born from one's own causes. Therefore, in respect to self-awareness, the defects you brought forth do not follow. As it has been said:

Consciousness is born as distinct from insentient things.

This only is its self awareness: its not being insentient.

Self awareness is not divided into action and *kāraṅkas*:
as it is one without parts, it cannot have three natures.³⁹³

Reply | To this we say:

Having resorted to the sense of words as well-established through conventional usage in terms of the division into action and *kāraṅkas*, we spoke a refutation. Because, the word 'self-awareness' expresses that sense. If on the other hand,

³⁹³ *Tattvasaṃgraha* 2000.1.

fearing a flaw, even the sense of words as well-established in the world is abandoned, then, you will be refuted according to the world itself.

Even in this way, self-awareness is not established as an ultimate. It is as follows: it has been said that what is born from causes and conditions, like a reflected image, lacks an essence. And in this way, clearly there is no self-awareness of cognition, since in reality it has no essence of its own. And not having an essence, the self-awareness of a lotus in the sky makes no sense. Moreover, for a proponent of *Madhyamaka*, the nature of being insentient is not ultimately established for anything: it is through the latter that the sentient, distinguished from the insentient, could exist as self-awareness. Therefore it would be fit to speak of this only towards others, proponents of things as real. Thus, due to lack of an essence, in no way whatsoever can self-awareness be established. Once again, we will show this elaborately later, in the section explaining the 'placements of awareness'.

Presently, making understood that, even accepting the quality of self-illumination of a lamp, self-awareness of the intellect is not fit, he says 'A light' and so on:

A light illumines: cognising this through cognition,
it can be told. 20

Intellect illumines: cognising this through what,
can it be told?

A lamp might even have the quality of self illumination, and yet it is not a similar example to establish the self-awareness of the intellect: this is the overall sense. A light illumines: it shines independently from another lamp, of its own accord. Cognising this, understanding this, through cognition, through the

intellect, it is told, it is made understood: because, the lamp has become an object of cognition. Intellect, cognition, illumines: this which is said, cognising this through what cognition, can it be told? [191] He asks the other.

Moreover, in this context, there is no basis for perception of the intellect: thus he shows that he does not suppose so. It is not that it may be perceived by a prior cognition: at the time of such cognition, it has not yet arisen, and thus does not exist. Nor may it be perceived by a cognition coming about subsequently: since then, being momentary, what has to be apprehended would have already gone. And also it may not be perceived by a cognition existing at the same time, since it would not in any way affect that cognition, and what does not affect something else cannot be an object: it has been said that ‘what is not a cause cannot be an object.’ Also, it may not perceive itself by itself, since this indeed is the point of controversy. Therefore, we do not understand how it could be perceived.

In this way, when the intellect is by all means not perceived, its self-awareness is very much unfit: thus he says ‘Luminous or not’ and so forth:

Luminous or not luminous,
when it is not seen by anyone, 21
like the games of a barren woman’s daughter,
even if it is spoken about, it is useless.

Luminous: having a luminous nature, like a light. Or not luminous: having a non-luminous nature, like a pot and so forth. The occurrence of the Sanskrit particle *vā* twice (translated as ‘or’) indicates discrete grouping. When the intellect is not seen by anyone, is not perceived by anyone, whether a perceiver

or itself. The word 'when' implies a subsequent 'then'. Then, just like the games, the leisure or sport, of the daughter, the one born from, a barren woman, one who has the quality of not giving birth; even if it is spoken about, even if it is recounted, it is useless. 'It' refers to the intellect. 'Useless', means fruitless. Since the daughter of a barren woman is not to be found, it cannot be perceived, therefore, its games are clearly not to be perceived: this is the intended sense.

Alternatively:

Because it is in essence neither arisen nor ceased, the intellect is similar to the daughter of a barren woman. Being the nature of that unperceived thing, self-awareness is like her games. That being unperceived, the latter is also not perceived. Therefore, even when it is spoken about through mere words devoid of reasoning, that self-awareness is useless: being something not to be taken up, it has no purpose.

The following may occur to the opponent:

Opponent | Yours are mere words devoid of reasoning: on this point, we have the following reasoning. Thus he says 'If there is no' and so forth:

If there is no self-awareness,
how is consciousness remembered? 22

If self-awareness of consciousness is not there, is not to be found, then, how is consciousness remembered?

Due to the non-existence of consciousness' self-awareness, at a subsequent time there should be no memory. Because, the memory of something not experienced is not fit, as it would include too much. Therefore, since it is seen that at a

subsequent time there is memory as the result of experience, the self-awareness of cognition exists: this is inferred.

Reply | This way to establish it, establishes nothing. Because, if memory were ascertained as an effect of self-awareness, memory could be a proof of self-awareness, just like smoke is a proof of fire. On the other hand, if self-awareness is not established by valid means, there is no apprehension of memory as being its effect. Because the observation of a cause-effect relationship is by all means due to inclusion through the observation of both factors.

And it is not that, just like from the eye and so forth consciousness may be established, even without observation memory may be established as its effect. Since, because when the eye is not there the cognition of blue and the like is also not there, one is inferred as the effect of the other. Memory, on the other hand, is there even without the self-awareness of cognition, as we are going to demonstrate: therefore, without the ascertainment of its being an effect of self-awareness, due to its existing even in the latter's absence, self-awareness is not established.

[192] Then, you should tell how even memory, being cognition, may be established: as an inferential sign, which is itself not established, does not make known anything else. And it is not that some cognition could be the object of another: because just as it is for external referents, the defects of a connection not being established, and so on, follow. Because there is no difference in terms of their being different, it should be apprehended even by a memory existing within another mental continuum. Or if you say that it is not remembered by the latter because it did not experience it earlier, it was not experienced earlier even by a cognition falling within the same continuum, hence the same follows.

Even a cause-effect relationship is not fit to corroborate it: the relationship of cause and effect is itself ultimately not existent; and also because, even if it is there, since it is situated within the own perception of the Omniscient Ones, it is impossible to apprehend it. When we accept conventional usages it is within constructs, and being within constructs, since all conventional usages are fashioned by constructs, means being within *samvṛti*: this that is to be established, has been established. Therefore, self-awareness cannot be established with memory as the reason.

Opponent | Then, in the absence of self-awareness, how is there memory, according to you?

Reply | Thus he says 'Due to connection' and so forth:

Due to connection to something other being experienced,
there is memory, as in the case of mouse poison.

When an apprehend-able thing, an object, other than cognition, has been experienced, memory, remembering, is born with cognition.

Indeed, if what is experienced is something other and memory is elsewhere, over-implication would follow. Thus he says: due to connection. When an object has been experienced, the memory of that consciousness occurs due to a connection. Because, consciousness is connected to that in terms of being the one who apprehends it, therefore that consciousness is remembered, and not something else.

If someone says:

Opponent | Even if a connection is there, as what is experienced is something other and memory is of something else, memory should be confused.

Reply | We reply that it is not so. Being an object experienced earlier and remembered at a subsequent time, it is the same one qualified by experience that is remembered. Since, it is that one, qualified by the former, to be apprehended. Moreover, cognition is itself the experience of an object and nothing else. Therefore, due to remembering the experience of an object, being connected to that, remembering is spoken of in reference to a cognition; it is not that even a mere cognition devoid of an object is remembered. Thus, there is no flaw.

Opponent | Well, how can it be that, without the seed of the impression of memory placed by the self-awareness of cognition, memory may occur at a subsequent time?

Reply | Thus he says: ‘as in the case of mouse poison’. Just like mouse poison, rat’s poison, is born later due to a connection, so also is memory: this is the intended sense.

It is as follows:

Rat’s poison, having come to the body at some instant, once again at a subsequent time, obtains the thundering of clouds. Then, even without the seed of the impression of memory placed by self-awareness, due to its occurrence being brought about by mere dependent arising, at another instant it undergoes change. Thus, even in regards to our topic, there is no flaw – such is the overall sense intended.

Opponent | Once again the *viññānavādin*, for the sake of establishing the self-awareness of cognition, shows a different procedure and says 'Because someone' and so forth:

Because someone endowed with another condition, sees it,
it illumines itself. 23

Another condition: another causal factor. The knowledge of a fortune-teller and so forth, or the super-knowledge of the cognition of others' mind and so forth; someone endowed with these two, a mind connected to these types of assemblage, sees it, it appears to consciousness, it illumines itself, it manifests itself. Self-awareness exists: this follows.

Because, if it is indeed by all means beyond perception in nature, how is it that sometimes, due to a specific assemblage, it is apprehended? Therefore, just like, due to a specific assemblage, the mind of others is apprehended, in the same way due to a condition like immediately precedent, support, and so forth, one's own mind also is apprehended. Such is the overall intended sense.

Reply | Even this is no corroboration of self-awareness: thus he says 'A pot seen' and so forth:

[193] A pot seen through the application of a *siddha*-ointment,
is surely not the ointment.

Siddha-ointment is either a magically prepared ointment, or, the ointment from a *Siddha*. Its application means its employment. A pot, or a treasure and the like, seen, perceived due to that, is surely not the ointment: it is not that a pot and the rest could be the ointment itself.

When one thing is perceived due to another, the former is not itself the latter. Thus, through a cognition aided by the knowledge of a fortune-teller and so forth, another's mind is seen, like a pot and so forth: yet, self-awareness may not be established by this fact. Because, even this means of establishment does not corroborate what is to be established.

Opponent | Well, if knowledge were to be by nature unknown, there should also not be a perception of its object. Because the quality of making known would not be known as pertaining to cognition, it could not make its object evident. If that is not perceived, how could the object be?

In this way:

due to the negation of self-awareness, and;

because one distinct thing cannot apprehend another, and also;

because if it is accepted that it can apprehend that, for the perception of what is gradually subsequent and unperceived, following another adjacent knowledge, infinite regress follows;

then, in no way whatsoever there may be perception of the object. Therefore, what has been said: 'due to connection', and so forth – that is unsuitable: because, the experience of an object is not there.

And: all this conventional usages in the world, like 'seen' and so forth, could not be there.

Reply | Thus he says 'Things as seen' and so on. When it is said that conventional usages like 'seen' and so forth, could not be there, is it that they could not be there ultimately, or in terms of *saṃvṛti*? Here if you say that they could not be there ultimately, then this is agreeable to us. Since, for something within *saṃvṛti*, there is no occasion to be considered as an ultimate

(*paramārtha*). Or, if you are referring to what is well-established within the world, then:

Things as seen, heard or cognised
are not here denied. 24

Things as seen: perceived directly by the consciousness of the eye and so forth. Heard: from another person, or from traditional texts (*āgama*). Cognised: ascertained due to an inference born from the three-fold inferential sign. All of this here, having remained within conventional usage, is surely not denied: it is not excluded. What and how is perceived according to the world, is accepted in that very manner, not analysing its nature, due to its being well-established within the world: but not, on the other hand, ultimately. Therefore, flaws like the fact that there would be no perception of an object in the absence of the self-awareness of cognition, are here not occasioned for one who is talking from an ultimate perspective.

Opponent | If ‘it is accepted just in that very manner’, then what is here denied?

Reply | Thus he says ‘Construing as true’ and so on:

Construing as true, on the other hand,
is here excluded: it is the cause of suffering.

As true, means: as an ultimate. Construing is superimposition. The Sanskrit particle *tu* is in the sense of ‘on the other hand’. That, on the other hand here, i.e. under analysis or within the *siddhānta*, is excluded, is denied. Why? It is the cause of suffering: this expresses the reason. The sense is: since it is the cause, the causal factor, for suffering, therefore etc. This is because, the aggregates of

appropriation continue in *saṃsāra* only due to causes of occurrence brought by constructs like existence, non-existence and so forth: and, *saṃsāra* has the nature of suffering. Since it has been said:

They are suffering: arising, world, a locus for views, and becoming.³⁹⁴

Therefore, construing as true is the cause of suffering. Therefore, here the only wish is only to deny the insistence upon a construct superimposing the false: on the other hand, nothing real is being denied. Thus, in this way, the self-awareness of cognition is in no way whatsoever fit. As it has been said:

[194] Mind is not seen by the *Tathāgatas*
as something to be awakened or someone who does that.
Where there is someone who awakens and something to be
awakened,
no awakening is to be found.³⁹⁵

On the other hand, the existence of mind-only, spoken of in certain occasions by the Blessed One, is just like the aggregates, entrances and so forth: the intended sense has to be drawn out. This will be later explained.

Now, having exhausted an incidental topic, going back to the subject matter at hand he says 'If illusion', and so forth:

If illusion is not different from mind,
or if it is construed as not identical either: 25
if it is a reality, then how can it not be different?
If it is not different, it does not really exist.

³⁹⁴ *Abhidharmakośa* 1.8

³⁹⁵ *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*

Thus, the illusion may be: different from mind, or not different, or having the nature of both alternatives, or having the nature of neither. These are the four possible alternatives.

Among these, the first cannot then be the case. When it is also accepted that it is different from mind, there would be a contradiction to the *siddhānta* of one who accepts the world as being only mind. In regards to the second position, on the other hand, the flaw has already been explained, by the section starting with ‘When an illusion is itself not there for you’. And the third way does not hold together, because, two mutually contradictory qualities cannot exist in the same locus.

The fourth hypothesis also, does not hold together. Taking it up, he says ‘illusion is not different from mind’ to deny difference. If it is not different, then ‘not identical either’ denies identity as well. If the position of both is construed, is laid out, that too is not fit: for two mutually exclusive things, the negation of one is included within the assertion of the other, because the two cannot exist in the same locus – thus, the fourth hypothesis too does not hold.

Moreover:

If it is a reality: if that illusion is really existent, how is it not different from mind? how is it not apart from it? Or, if it is not different, if mind is itself the illusion, then it does not really exist, is not ultimately to be found: since they are in nature identical, there is only mind alone. In this case, what accrues has been said earlier: ‘When an illusion is itself not there for you, then what is to be apprehended?’

Now, having taken care of the subject matter at hand, and to sum up a conclusion, he says ‘Like an illusion’ and so forth:

Like an illusion, though non-existent, can be seen,
so too is for the one who sees, the mind. 26

Non-existent: the illusion which can be apprehended, like a horse and so forth, is really not existent by nature. Just like even such an illusion can be seen, can be an object of sight, so too is for the one who sees, the mind. That illusion, non-existent and yet to be seen, is itself the example: it is in the same way that the mind, even by nature not ultimately existent, may be capable of seeing. In this way, what had been said earlier by the opponent: 'When even erring does not exist', and so forth, is taken care of. He shows it, by summing up a conclusion.

Again, referring to an opponent's stratagem to prove, in one more way yet, that consciousness ultimately exists, he says 'If *saṃsāra*', and so forth:

If *saṃsāra* must be based on something real,
it should then be something other, like space,

Opponent | Thus: affliction and purification are two things to be properly engaged with: as something to be abandoned and something to be taken up. In that respect, a mind covered by the stains of desire and so forth, is called 'afflicted'. And these occur based on the mind, and adventitious, because they arise from the force of false superimposition. *Saṃsāra* originates as a continuity of successive births, from *karman* produced due to those.

That mind itself:

ultimately luminous by nature;
not adventitious;
empty of the impressions coming from insistence upon the superimposition of
two things, like something to be apprehended and another who does it, brought
up by false misconception;
by nature without those two;
free from adventitious stains;
due to a revolution of the basis, it is called 'purification'.

Thus, without mind as something really occurring, no establishment of affliction
and purification can be accomplished.

[195] This is what the opponents think, as *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are *dharmas* of
mind. Since, there is a quote:

Only mind is afflicted; only mind is purified.

The following, describes no more than such an opponent opinion:

A real thing itself, mind itself as really existent, is its basis: such a thing is said
to be 'based on something real'.

Reply | If *saṃsāra* is laid out to be so, then *saṃsāra* should be something other,
should be other than mind. Being different from what is real, it should be unreal:
because only mind is real. What does it then resemble? It is like space, like the
sky.

This *saṃsāra*, which is said to be based on mind; is it real or unreal? And even
if it is real, is it mind, or is it different from the latter?

In this regards, if it is real and is mind itself, then it is not that there is *samsāra*, different from the mind and based on the latter: it is mind itself. And mind is not something to be abandoned, because it is in essence purification, being luminous by nature. Or, if it is different from mind, then by accepting something else apart from mind, one's *siddhānta* is harmed.

Or, it is something unreal: then, there is nothing going by the name of *samsāra*, just like in the case of a hare's horn. For this very reason he says 'like space'. Just like space, merely a conceptual existence, is not existent, is nowhere capable of purposeful activity, so too *samsāra* would be, according to you. Alternatively, it is 'like space' due to lack of essence, and thus you enter into our own *siddhānta*.

One may say:

Opponent | Although it is unreal, nonetheless it will be capable of purposeful activity by taking a really existent mind as its basis.

Reply | Thus he says 'By taking something real', and so forth:

By taking something real as its basis,
how could something non-existent gain activity? 27

For something non-existent there cannot be any basis whatsoever, because the relationship of basis and based upon has the nature of cause-effect. And, non-existence is not an effect of anything, because it does not have any specificity that could be brought about. Let even that be the case; still, by taking something real as its basis, by taking as its basis a really existent mind, how could something non-existent, something itself not existing, gain activity, gain

efficacy in respect to purposeful activity? The question implies that this is never fit. Otherwise, it would have the nature of being existent: capacity is the defining trait of existence. Because it has been said that

Lack of all capacity, is the defining trait of non-existence.

What now? That is what you are brought to ponder about. Thus he says ‘Mind for you’ and so on:

Mind for you has surely become
one, with non-existence for company.

Non-existence itself, a non-existent thing, is its company: thus, with non-existence for company. The Sanskrit particle *hi*, is in the sense of ascertainment. One, indeed without a second, mind has surely become: for you, who propound mind as the only ultimate.

Opponent | Well, we have surely said that: mind is free from aspects like something to be apprehended and another who does that, by definition without those two. Therefore, explanation in terms of mind being one alone is not something we would not accept.

Reply | It is unfit for you to say so: you also asserted the reality of affliction; as something to be abandoned. Then how could mind be the one and only real?

Let it even be so: even still, there would be no liberation from what binds. Thus he says ‘When mind’, and so forth:

When mind is free from something to be apprehended,
then, all are *Tathāgatas*. 28

Free from something to be apprehended, implies more: it should also be understood as free from someone who apprehends and so forth. Alternatively: being someone who apprehends is dependent upon something to be apprehended: in the absence of the latter, the former does not exist. And when there is no-one who apprehends, due to the non-existence of something to be expressed, fashioned by it, nothing to be expressed exists. He says 'free from something to be apprehended' to represent all of the above.

When the mind of the whole world is bereft of the aspects of apprehended and apprehender and so forth, and is by nature without the two, then: since that mind is included in the continuum of each and every living being, all living beings within *saṃsāra* have now become *Tathāgatas*, Blessed Buddhas. [196] There should be no ordinary person. It thus would follow that the cultivation of the Noble Path for the destruction of afflictions should be futile: and such is not the case. Therefore, even when there is lack of apprehended and apprehender, since one attached to existence remains within that, there is no complete destruction of afflictions. With this intent he says 'And in this way', and so forth:

And in this way, what good is got,
even when mind-only has been conceived of?

The phrase 'and in this way' is used in the sense of 'such being the case'. 'And' means: even. Even having accepted in this way, what good is got? None whatsoever. Even when mind-only, even when cognition-only, has been conceived of, has been superimposed through a construct. Since, even in the presence of through cognition of *tattva* as the absence of the two, desire and the rest remain within the continuum of each and every living being.

Opponent | Well, this is the same even for you who propound essencelessness: bringing on that this is a refutation that applies to both, he says 'Even when', and so forth:

Even when similarity to an illusion is cognised,
how can the affliction stop? 29

Even when similarity to an illusion, having the nature of an illusion, on the part of the world, is cognised, how can the affliction stop, how can the host of desire and so forth be destroyed? Thus he asks.

What is here the reason for the impossibility of destruction - that makes you ask? Thus he says 'When, towards an illusory woman' and so forth:

When, towards an illusory woman,
desire is born even in its maker.

Here, this is the seed of the impossibility of destruction: when, towards an illusory woman, towards a woman fashioned by an illusionist, desire, having a desirous mind, is born, arises. In whom does it arise? Even in its maker. Not only is it born in those for whose deception she has been fashioned, but it is born even in the maker, in the one who fashioned that illusory woman: this is the sense of the word 'even'.

To make others' minds confused, some illusionist, very expert in fashioning such shapes, displays some miss-universe. She is concocted by the capacity of *mantras* and herbs, and is complete in the traits and portions of each and every

limb; endowed with a wealth of splendour, from fresh youth, she has a clear and attractive complexion, and is exceedingly beautiful.

Then indeed, it is not that only other people, having observed her, have their minds distressed by the many blows from Love's arrows. On the other hand, even he who fashioned that longing shape skilled in the arts of Love, that wealth of desirable beauty; he who knows well her nature, knowing that 'I myself made her'; even he, obtaining the ultimate condition through Love's craft, is incapable of holding his own mind together in any way. In which case: how, even when similarity to an illusion has been ascertained, could there be the cutting off of the continuum of *samsāra*?

Reply | Wishing to put all this argument away, he says 'Because the impression', and so forth:

Because the impression of affliction from something cognisable
is not destroyed in her maker, 30
therefore, at the time of seeing that,
the impression of the empty, is weak in him.

The Sanskrit particle *hi* is in the sense of 'because'.

This refutation does not stick on us. Because, 'it is not destroyed': not stopped. In her maker, in the one who fashioned that illusory woman. What is not destroyed? The impression of affliction from something cognisable: due to superimposition of the quality of having an essence, attachment and so forth; or, the superimposition of reality. This means the obscuration of something cognisable.

From beginning-less *samsāra*, in one birth after another, false constructs have been repeated again and again. A mental continuum occurs, being born as its seed; placing formations within that, is its 'impression': due to the fact that the latter has not been destroyed.

[197] *Opponent* | Well, this is the same system as that of the *viñānavādin*. For him also, even if *tattva* exists as the absence of the two, because the impression of adventitious afflictions has not been destroyed, not everyone is a *Tathāgata*.

Reply | No, this is not the same, because, stains not existent by nature and devoid of any efficacy, cannot possibly be an obscuration: this has indeed been explained. In our case though, what is without essence is both something to be born and that which gives birth to it: so, it is not the same.

Because that is not destroyed, therefore: due to that reason. At the time of seeing *that*: the seeing, apprehending, of that quality of having an essence on the part of something cognisable; at that time. Alternatively: at the time of seeing, at the time of apprehending, that illusory woman. In him: in the seer, whose impression from afflictions has not been destroyed. The impression of the empty is weak can be either explained as: of the empty *tattva*, or, of emptiness. In order to respect the metre, an elision of the generalising suffix has been made and 'empty' is what is mentioned. The impression is the placing of formations. That is weak, bereft of capacity, due to seeing something superimposed. Therefore, at that time the impression of existence is strong.

Opponent | How, then, does that stop?

Reply | Thus he says 'By placing', and so on:

By placing the impression of emptiness,
the impression of existence wanes.³¹

The impression of emptiness: of essencelessness, by nature like an illusion. Its placing is its casting: thus, making steady through repeated practice. By that opposing condition, it wanes, it stops: just like cold touch, by placing fire nearby. What stops? The impression of existence: the impression determined by apprehending things as real, practiced from beginning-less *samsāra*. Because: the former has an authentic referent, and it is the own nature of things; while the latter is false and adventitious.

Opponent | Well, whether it is attachment to existence or attachment to emptiness, there is no difference whatsoever in respect to its being attachment: since the second type also, does not go beyond the nature of being a construct. As it has been said:

Emptiness has been explained by the wise
as the departure of all views.
But those for whom emptiness is a view,
He said, are hopeless.³⁹⁶

Reply | To answer this he says ‘And by practicing’ and so forth:

And by practicing that ‘nothing is there’,
that too, later, wanes away.

Nothing: existence, or emptiness. Is there, is to be found. The word ‘and’ is to make a whole, distinct from what comes before. And, by practicing in this way,

³⁹⁶ *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 23.8

after the destruction of the impression of existence, that too, the impression of the empty also, wanes away, stops.

This is what is intended: casting 'emptiness', being the opposing factor against attachment to existence, is a means for the latter's abandonment. And once the means have been realised, later, since it is similar to a raft, one takes care to abandon the means as well. In this very sense it has been said:

The teaching of the ambrosia of emptiness is to vanquish all mental constructs.

If one has grasping even for that, you set him aside.³⁹⁷

One may say:

Opponent | By practicing in one's mind that 'nothing is there', abandonment of the impression of emptiness may indeed occur. Nevertheless, the construct of non-existence that comes about due to such practice, cannot be made to cease. And in this way, what enters the cheek comes out from the eye's pupil: it is tough to stay in such condition of yours.

Reply | To this he says 'When existence', and so forth:

[198] When existence is not obtained,
which one may construe as 'it is not there', 32
then how could non-existence, without a basis,
remain before the mind?

Even what you mentioned, under analysis, does not remain. Existence, which one may construe as 'it is not there': existence, of which one may make a negation. If that, when analysed, due to its essencelessness, is not obtained: is

³⁹⁷ *Lokātilāstava* 21

not got, like a cluster of hair apprehended by someone with an eye-disease. Then, without a basis: for someone who misconstrued existence, when what is connected to it is not there, how could non-existence, without a support, a form displayed by constructs, remain before his mind? How could it, under analysis, appear to his intellect? On its own accord, when existence has no essence, it stops.

Alternatively: the opponent attacks us in another way:

Opponent | By placing the influence of emptiness, there may even be a cessation of the impression of existence. But in the absence of its negation, what is going to prevent attachment to non-existence?

Reply | Therefore he says, 'When existence', and so forth. The rest can be entirely explained as in the first explanation.

This is here the overall sense:

The emptiness of all *dharma*s is indeed taken up to abandon attachment to existence. That emptiness also, after facing emptiness directly, wanes away. And whichever construct of existence may somehow be born, that also ceases through an immediately subsequent analysis. Therefore, for the cessation of the net of all these constructs, in the Blessed Perfection of Wisdom, eighteen types of emptiness, starting with inner emptiness, have been elaborately explained.

And it is not that emptiness is apart from existence: because, it is the nature of existence itself. Otherwise, emptiness being separate from existence, *dharma*s would not lack an essence. Essencelessness is their nature: this has been proved earlier. And this has been said in the Perfection of Wisdom:

Moreover, Subhūti, a Bodhisattva, great being, practicing in the Perfection of Wisdom, through mental acts linked to the knowledge of all aspects, observes in this way: it is not that form is

empty of the emptiness of form: form itself is empty, emptiness itself is form. It is not that feeling is empty of the emptiness of feeling: feeling itself is empty, emptiness itself is feeling. It is not that notion is empty of the emptiness of notion: notion itself is empty, emptiness itself is notion. It is not that formations are empty of the emptiness of formations: formations themselves are empty, emptiness itself is formations. It is not that consciousness is empty of the emptiness of consciousness: consciousness itself is empty, emptiness itself is consciousness.

And so forth.

It has also been said that

You consider dependent arising as emptiness itself.

'There is no autonomous existence', is your unmatched lion roar.³⁹⁸

Thus, emptiness is not apart from a *dharma*. Therefore, one should not become attached even to emptiness.

In this way, by throwing away all constructs, comes about freedom from all obscurations. Showing this fact, he says 'When neither' and so forth:

[199] When neither existence nor non existence

remains before the mind, 33

then, as there is no other go,

support-less, it is pacified.

When neither existence: an ultimately existent essence remains before, in front of, the mind, the intellect. Nor, non-existence: non-existence, whose defining trait is to be bereft of existence, remains before the mind. Then, as there is no other go, because there is no other go apart from assertion and negation: the positions of both and neither are made of the pair of assertion and negation;

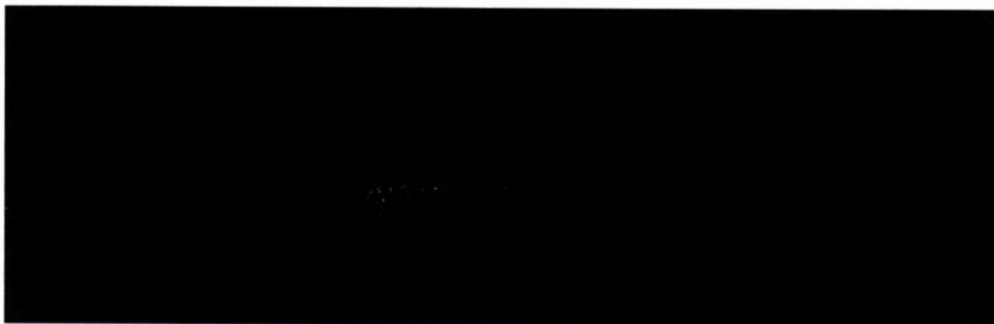
³⁹⁸ *Lokāṭītaśtaśva* 20

hence, as they are not separate from them, they are also included once the first two have been included. Thus, without a basis, not being joined to the support of either something existent or something non-existent, the intellect becomes pacified, becomes extinct. This means that, due to the extinction of all constructs, like fire without fuel, it reaches cessation.

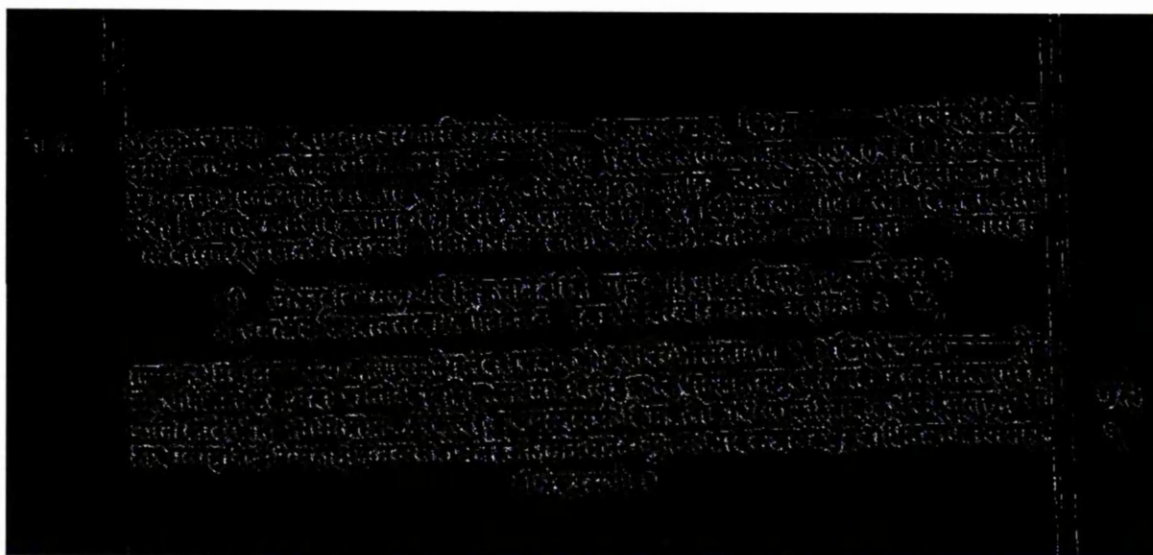
Appendix 2

Reproduction of a Devanāgarī manuscript containing Nāgārjuna's
Lokātīstava, together with an anonymous commentary:

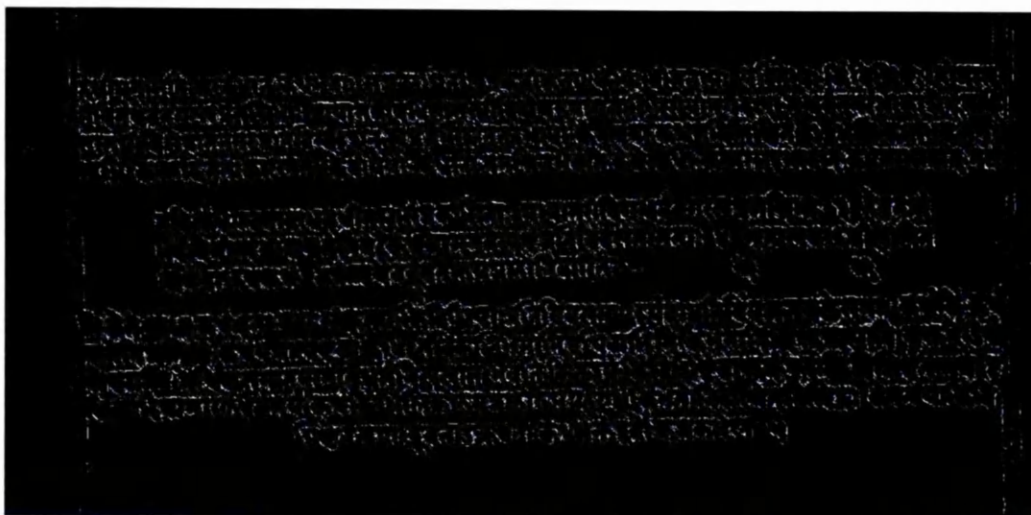
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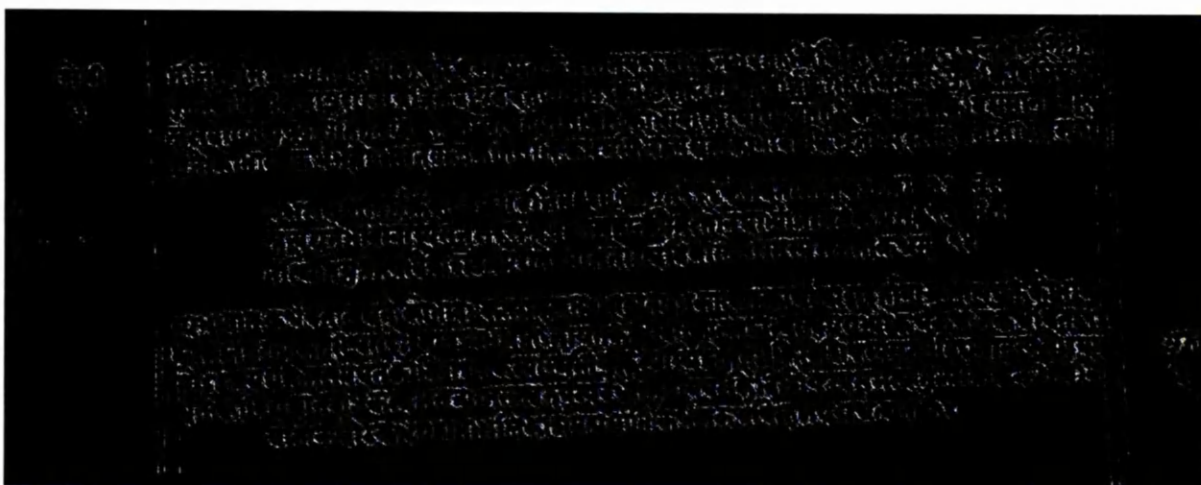
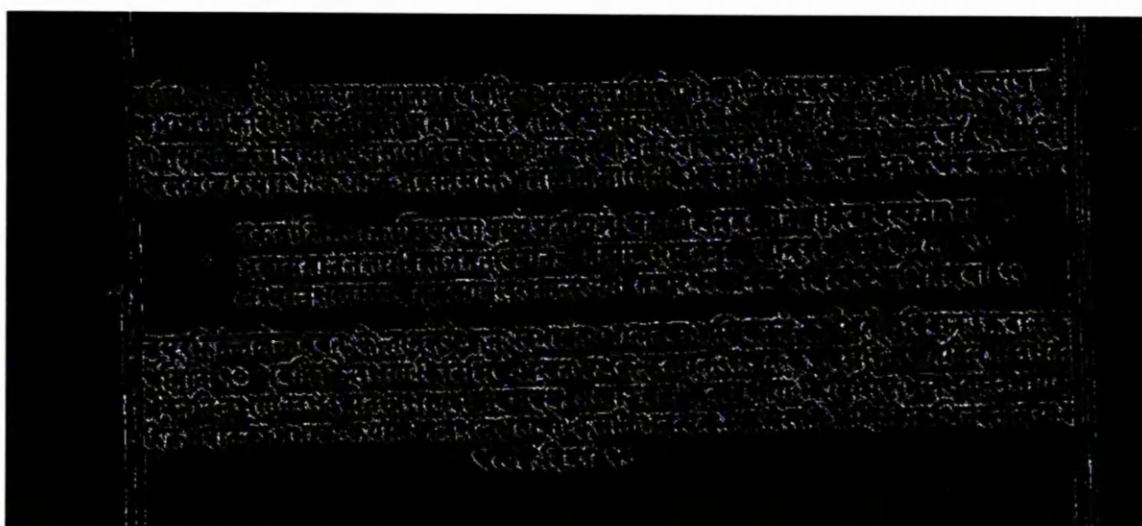
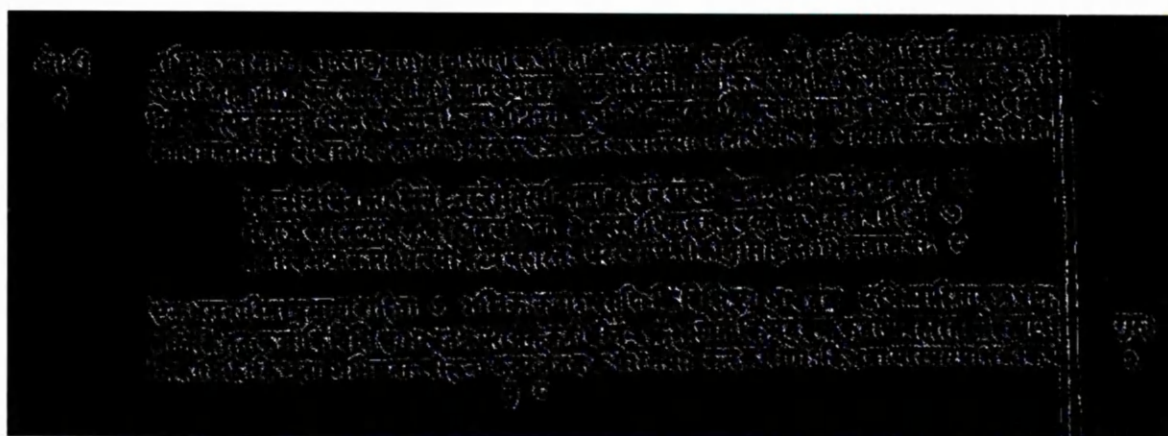


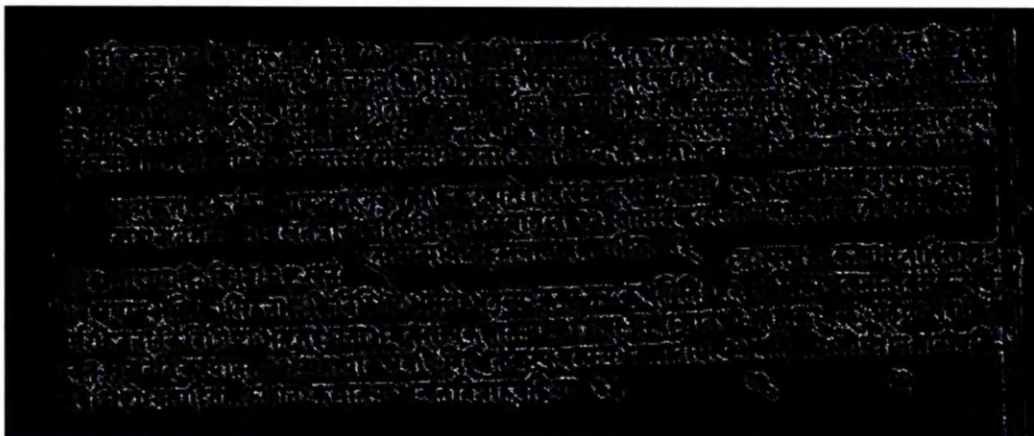
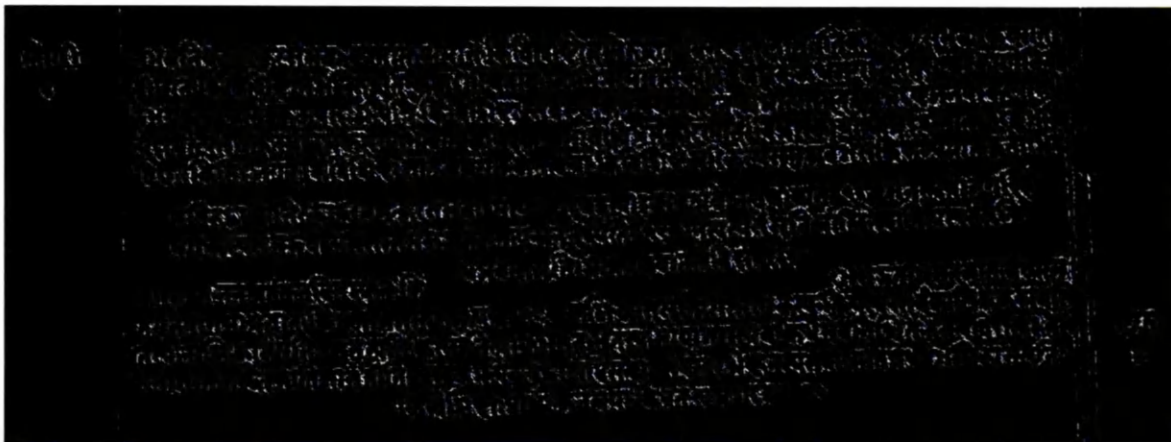
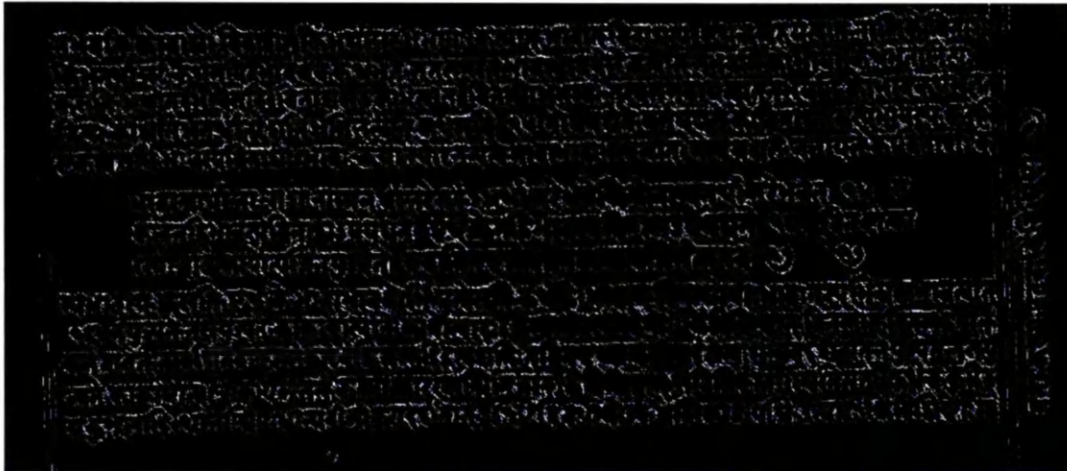
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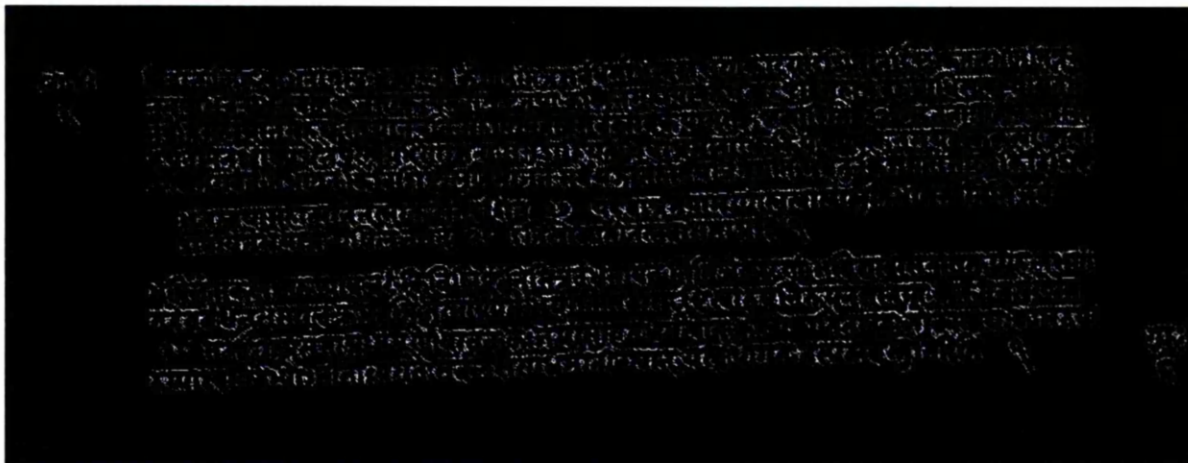
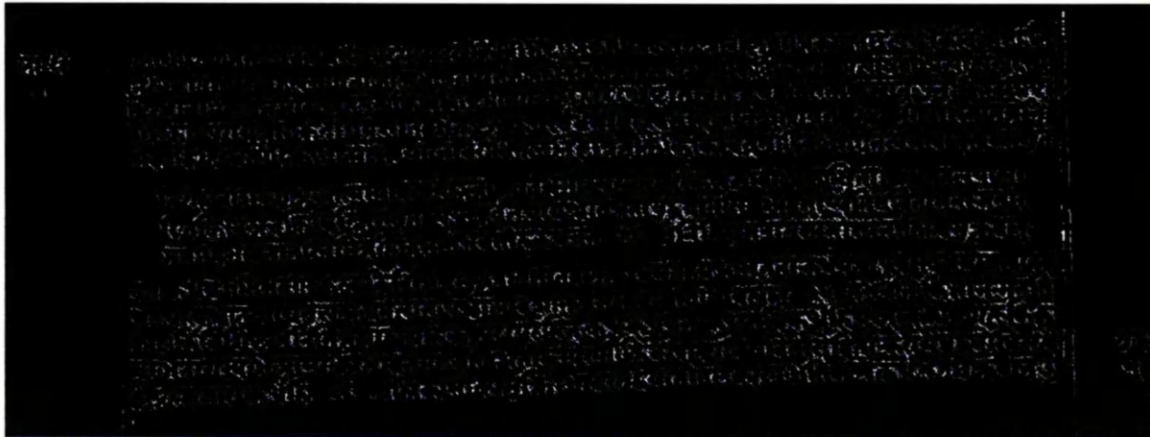


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